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# MUSIC LEGENDS

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# AC/DC

The Bon Scott Years

AC/DC

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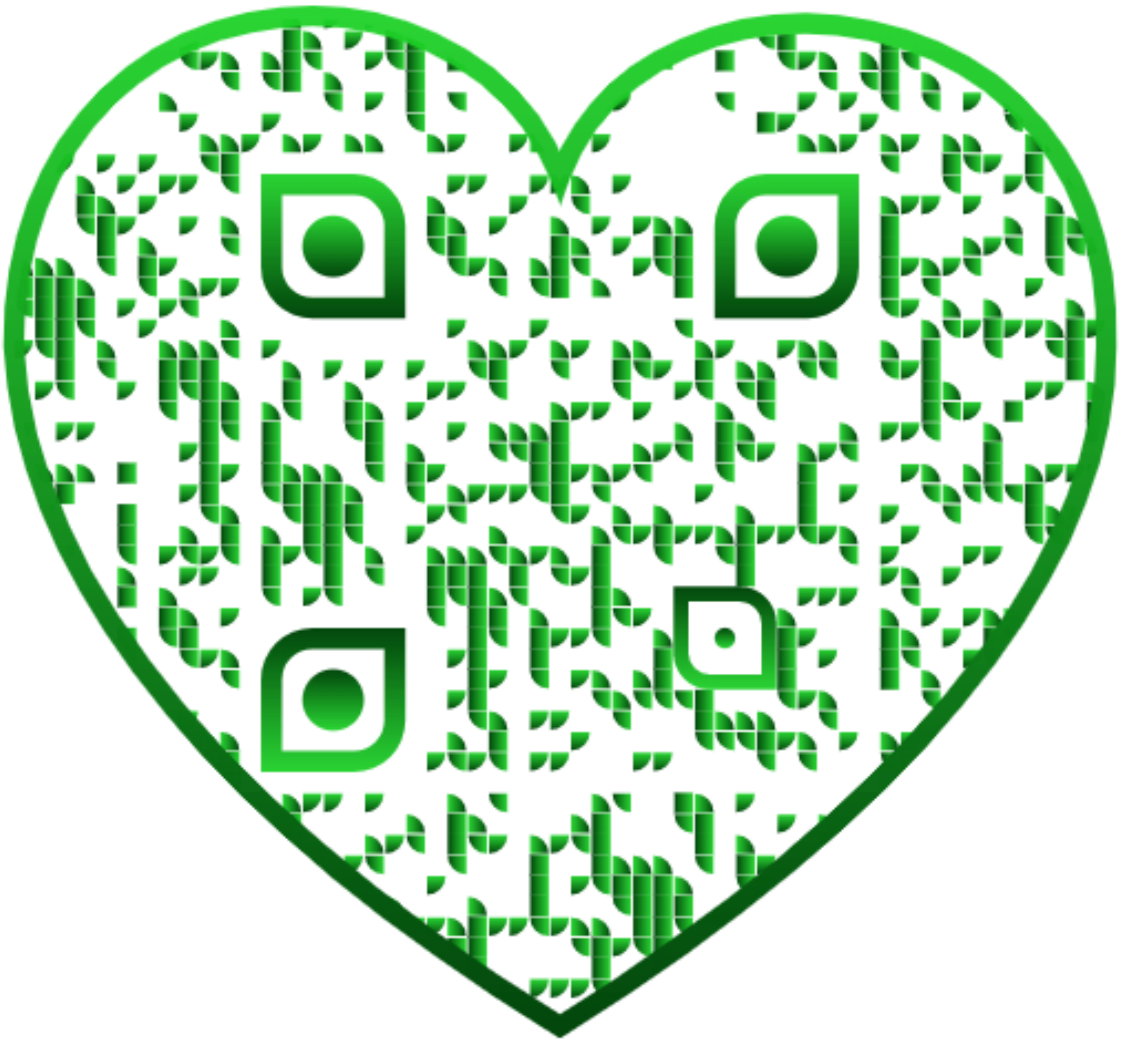

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# Editor's Welcome

**Welcome to Music Legends the interactive magazine for music lovers. Music Legends brings the magic of the digital age to the world of music magazines.**

Just as the title suggests, Music Legends showcases a great range of articles featuring new insights into the biggest names in the history of rock music. Sure, the music is powerful, but so too are the tales of the darker underside of fame and fortune; the booze, the fights, artistic differences, the drugs, the splits, the lawsuits, the politics and so much more. With Music Legends there is a whole new digital dimension for you to enjoy. Today, the modern reader is no longer limited to simply what can be conveyed on the printed page, so check out what treats are on offer inside this issue below.

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Music Legends is proud to present this exciting reader promotion – in conjunction with Coda Records we are offering a free covermount CD to celebrate our cover stars – legendary rockers AC/DC.

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Keep your eyes peeled for exclusive free CDs on forthcoming issues, and if you love this month's offering then why not send us a snap or a short review to be featured in the next issue.

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*H. Carruthers*

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# AC/DC

## The Bon Scott Years

Today AC/DC are one of the biggest acts on the planet, but there was a time when their future seemed far less certain. Here we look at the impact and legacy of their powerhouse frontman Bon Scott, from the band's inception to his tragic death in 1980.

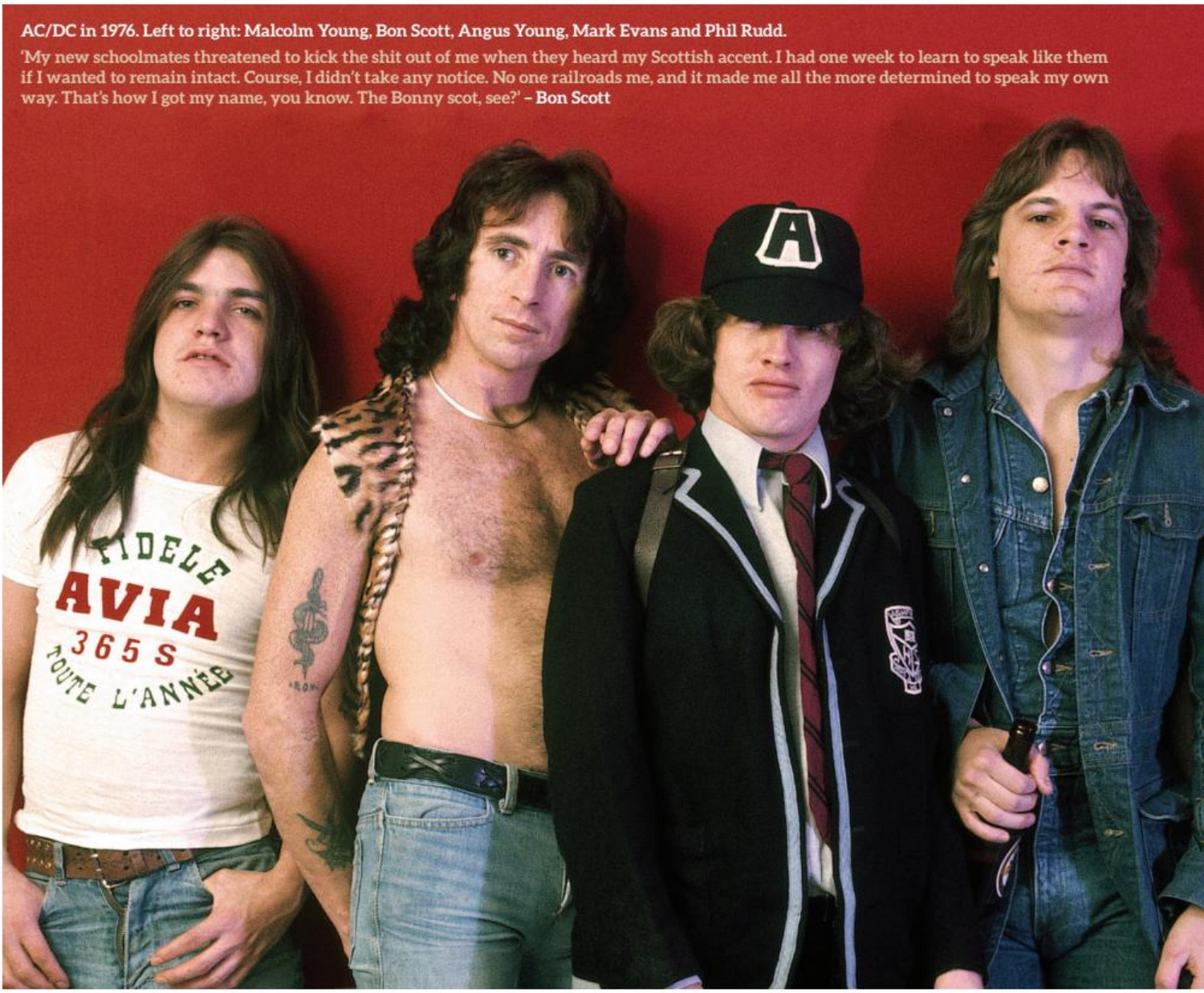
**As AC/DC had the whole world at their feet, that same world dealt the band the cruellest of blows and collapsed around them overnight. Many bands would simply have given up or retreated back into obscurity. They had suddenly been robbed of one of the most recognisable rock voices and a performer whose massive presence and personality was all but impossible to replace. On a more personal and even more painful level they had suffered the loss of a close friend who had been with them from their humble beginnings and who had played a major part in their subsequent staggering success.**

Somehow, out of this tragedy AC/DC pulled themselves back from the abyss and managed the impossible, producing an album that has gone down in history as one of the classics of all time. The perfectly named *Back in Black* contained more than a little of the spirit of the departed Bon Scott and finally propelled the band to the super stardom that they had been so close to before his death. The album remains one of the all-time bestsellers, having sold over forty-two million copies worldwide. It was everything that Bon would have wanted and deserved. With the knowledge of just how difficult a task it would be to front a band still reeling from such a tragedy, everyone recognised that it would take a brave or maybe foolish man to even consider trying to fill such shoes. For the band it would be a decision of career-changing proportions.

Whilst searching for a new singer, AC/DC remembered that Bon had once said how much he rated Brian Johnson, who he had seen fronting a band called Geordie back in the early seventies. They tracked him down and an audition was arranged. No-nonsense Brian arrived complete with his now-familiar cloth cap, then settled in with an impromptu game of pool with the AC/DC roadies before blasting out a piece of Bon Scott legend in *Whole Lotta Rosie*.

Despite honouring their obligation to audition several more contenders during the following weeks it was Bon's recommendation that held firm and Johnson got the gig. Initially surprised at their decision to even carry on at all, the fans' reaction to the reports of Brian Johnson replacing the now legendary Bon Scott was an under-whelming mixture of concern and anxiety. Could AC/DC carry it off? How could anyone go on stage and try to replace their departed hero?

Because a hero is exactly what Bon Scott was to his fans. His stage presence was magnetic. He was dangerous, intoxicating, unpredictable, and yet somehow endearing. He connected with everyone, fixing you with piercing eye contact while flashing a conspiratorial grin that had fans following him anywhere. Stripped to the waist, he showed off a body that belied his heavy drinking rock 'n' roll lifestyle. The girls in the audience loved him and yet the guys identified with him too, seeing that he was, at the end of the day, one of the lads. You could imagine him as the guy at the bar sharing jokes, or mending your car or stealing your girlfriend. He could out-sing, out-drink and out-perform a rock world already top heavy with similar contenders. Here was a man living life full on at the very last stretch of the rope.




**AC/DC in 1976. Left to right: Malcolm Young, Bon Scott, Angus Young, Mark Evans and Phil Rudd.**

'My new schoolmates threatened to kick the shit out of me when they heard my Scottish accent. I had one week to learn to speak like them if I wanted to remain intact. Course, I didn't take any notice. No one railroads me, and it made me all the more determined to speak my own way. That's how I got my name, you know. The Bonny scot, see?' – **Bon Scott**

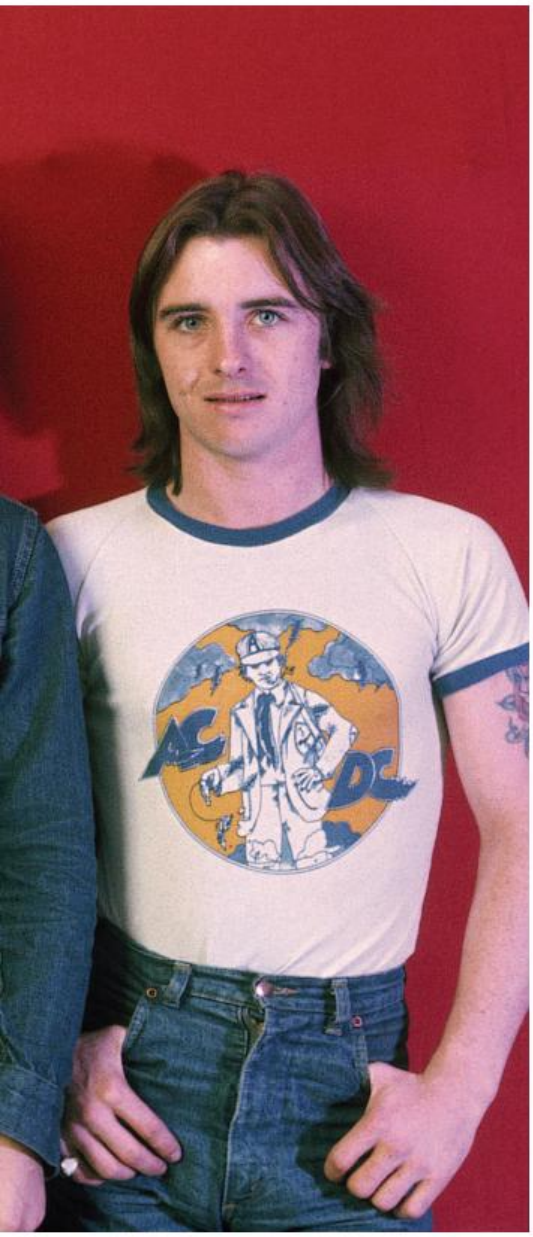
The shock of Bon Scott's death hit rock's foundations like an earthquake. He certainly drank heavily and had done so for nearly all of his thirty-three years, yet he somehow seemed indestructible. Bon Scott would always be there disarming you with a wink, never taking himself too seriously, grinning one minute, snarling the next, whilst coaxing the very limits out of the band. There was no huge rock star ego in the man and he would often step back into the shadows allowing the schoolboy on speed, Angus Young, to run riot in front of him. His voice echoed his years of hard drinking and reckless living but was perfectly suited to the AC/DC sound. He had an almost Alex Harvey style, that filtered into his often tongue-in-cheek lyrics. Anyone who saw Bon Scott with AC/DC will never forget the experience and it is so easy to see him, larger than life, frozen in his glory of 1979, leaning over the front of the stage with the audience eating out of his hands.

When tragedy struck it came in a quietly sad and lonely way, which somehow betrayed his memory as the ultimate party animal and friend to all. If he was to die it could only conceivably be something suitably dramatic. The manner of his death has generated years of speculation, not only due to the vagueness and variability of the witness accounts, but also in part because of the fans' unwillingness to accept that he had died in such tragically avoidable circumstances. Of course, there was a whole story before then and the paths that eventually brought AC/DC together stretch across the globe from Scotland, to Australia and beyond.

> 'We've always been a true band. You won't find anyone truer.'
>
> **Malcolm Young**

Ronald Belford Scott was born on 9 July 1946 in Kirriemuir, Scotland. He was taken to Australia at the age of six when his parents emigrated, and it was here that the Bon Scott we all know really began to form. His parents described him as always cheeky, lively and most of all – mischievous.

He left school at fifteen, brushed with authority several times and even ended up in prison. He was of quite a short stature at only five foot five, a fact that is surprising to anyone that saw him up there onstage. But, he more than




compensated for that by being tough and earning respect among the gangs of Melbourne.

Scott learnt the drums from an early age, and when his father encouraged him to use his skill and play with the Fremantle Pipe Band, he had already been in several acts. He had been in the Spektors, tasted success with the Valentines, and then enjoyed a level of local stardom with Fraternity.

When his parents moved to Perth in 1956, a new phase in his life began that saw him winning awards for his drumming in the pipe band, and appearing on local television – his very first taste of fame. His interest in rock 'n' roll led to a lifelong admiration for Little Richard, and he began to perform at beach parties and discovered his voice singing such classics as *Blue Suede Shoes* and *Long Tall Sally*.

At the age of sixteen Bon was arrested on charges of giving a false name and address to police and attempting to escape custody. He was also charged with unlawful carnal knowledge, relating to an incident involving a slightly younger girlfriend and for stealing twelve gallons of petrol. He was sent into the care of the Child Welfare Department for two years. It was a tough lesson for the young Bon Scott to suddenly find himself locked away and unable to pursue his interest in music and girls so easily, and he resolved to never find himself in that position again.

His first real band was the Spektors, whom he joined on the drums in 1964. They stayed together for a year in the Perth area before merging with local band the Winztons to become the Valentines. The Valentines were more rhythm and blues than the Spektors had been and drew their inspiration from the English mod bands of the time such as The Who and the Small Faces. The Valentines' reputation quickly grew and before long they performed live in front of a crowd of three thousand in Perth. Shortly after, they signed a deal with Clarion Records who released their first single *Everyday I Have to Cry*. The band was delighted when it reached No. 5 in the Western Australian charts.

In the summer of 1967, the Valentines supported the Easybeats at Her Majesty's Theatre in Melbourne. They clearly impressed the better-known act, who gave the fledgling Valentines a song to release as their next single. Unfortunately *She Said* failed to maintain the impetus of the Valentines' first success and faded quickly. Despite this disappointment, the Valentines decided to move to Melbourne full time to pursue their career.

They arrived in October 1967, and continued to gig and build a following.

They were desperately poor, nearly starving and unable to afford accommodation, but Bon, ever the optimist, seemed totally undeterred and accepted their position with infectious enthusiasm. He wanted nothing else, and for him sleeping in the back of a van after appearing on stage had an intoxicating, almost beatnik feel to it. As long as there were girls and booze he was happy and, of course, there was always more than enough of both.

In February 1968 a further single was released, *I Can Hear the Raindrops* backed with *Why Me?*. The single received disappointing sales but increased their exposure, and a relentless gig schedule saw some improvement in the band's finances. The clubs and pubs of Melbourne were unforgiving to say the least, and the band were pelted with glasses one night then wildly popular the next – a tough and uncompromising lesson in life on the road.

During 1968–1969, two more Easybeats-penned singles *A Peculiar Hole in the Sky* and the more successful *My Old Man's a Groovy Old Man* saw better sales and a sleeker more produced sound. By now the Valentines were drawing bigger and more excited crowds, and had honed their image to one of a polished pop group. Bon was told to cut his hair, wear smart clothes and cover his tattoos as the image became almost as important as the music.

The next single of 1969 was a bizarre choice. However, *Nick Nack Paddy Whack* was backed by the first song co-credited to Bon Scott, *Getting Better*. When they flew back to Perth they were now celebrities and were met by nearly four thousand screaming fans. At this stage a downturn seemed inevitable, and the Valentines' days were numbered. The single *Juliette*, released in 1970, proved to be their last moment in the spotlight as they disbanded shortly after.

Bon was quickly recruited by Fraternity (one of the hottest bands in Australia at the time) as a vocalist rather than drummer and moved into the band's shared house in Sydney. Before he knew it Bon found himself supporting American legend Jerry Lee Lewis at the Apollo Theatre in Adelaide, as well as British bands such as Deep Purple and Free on their tours of Australia. A single, *Seasons of Change*, was released in 1971 and television appearances followed. One of these featured Bon riding his motorbike, a machine that he was reported to ride naked up and down stairs to entertain the ladies. Women were always a big part of his life, but Bon surprised even those closest to him when he married his girlfriend Irene Thornton on 24 January 1972. A tall leggy blonde that Bon met in 1971, Irene shared his lust for life and sense of humour.

Fraternity signed with RCA and their 1972 single *Welfare Boogie* sold well. RCA wanted greater global recognition for the band and Fraternity were soon flown off to London in November 1973 to make their first appearance on UK soil at London's Speakeasy club. During their tour they opened for the hard rocking northern band Geordie, fronted by Brian Johnson. Johnson impressed Bon greatly, something he often spoke of, which led to Johnson's appointment in AC/DC some years later. Unfortunately the English experiment failed to help the band take

AC/DC in the Netherlands in October 1976. 'I am the poet with this band.' – Bon Scott

off. London was awash with homegrown talent, and Fraternity returned to Australia only to disband shortly afterwards as RCA and their management shut down the finance.

Upon his return to Australia, Bon got a job on a fertilizer farm in Wallaroo, but he soon began to jam with local band the Mount Lofty Rangers. This didn't go well and following an all-day bender he turned up very late and very drunk, leading to a violent argument with the band and his wife Irene. He took off on his huge Triumph motorbike, riding off along the Stirling Highway, where he hit a car head on. He suffered terrible injuries and was not expected to survive. Bon ended up in traction for a month, along with missing teeth, a wired jaw, concussion, and a broken arm, leg and nose. He even spent three days in intensive care. Despite hardly leaving his bedside, Irene could no longer deal with Bon's errant behaviour, restlessness and unpredictability. The combination of which ensured that the marriage was soon over. Fortunately it was during this time that Bon was destined to cross paths with a couple of much younger Scots – the brothers, Malcolm and Angus Young.

> 'The more people they give us upfront the harder we play.'
>
> Bon Scott

Malcolm Mitchell Young was born in Glasgow, Scotland in 1953. His brother Angus joined him two years later. They were part of a family of eight children, seven boys looked after by their older sister Margaret. Music ran through the family and older brother Alex was the first to form a band. After backing Tony Sheridan, Alex's band later signed to the Beatles' Apple label as Grapefruit. A brood of that size took some supporting, and like the Scott family before them, the struggling Youngs took advantage of the assisted scheme to encourage families to emigrate to Australia, away from the terrible unemployment in Glasgow. The Youngs settled in the Burwood area where, in 1965, older brother George helped found the Easybeats. Their first single *For My Woman* was the start of a hugely successful career, and Malcolm and Angus watched in amazement as George became a star. Inspired by this they both started to learn the guitar. While still in his mid-teens, Angus joined local bands Kentuckee and Tantrum. He would run home from school, grab his guitar and play, still wearing his school uniform – a sight that soon became familiar to rock fans everywhere.

Malcolm joined a band called The Velvet Underground, the New South Wales namesake of the seminal New York band featuring Lou Reed, Nico and John Cale. They played at local clubs, pretending to be older than they actually were, performing covers of acts such as the Doors.

When Malcolm left The Velvet Underground he didn't have to look any further than his own younger brother, Angus, to start a new band. Malcolm and his ex-bandmate Dave Evans, teamed up and began to get their own band together. The Third World War was suggested as a name but it was older sister Margaret who spotted the band's eventual name on the back of a sewing machine. The connotations of sexual ambiguity clearly escaped them, and the name AC/DC was born simply out of the electricity that they hoped to create. Later when cheekily asked if he was AC or DC, Bon Scott replied, 'No, I'm the lightning in the middle' – how right he was.

Their first gig was at The Chequers in Sydney on New Years Eve 1973, during which they played mainly Chuck Berry, but also hits by the Rolling Stones and Free. Pretty soon Angus began to develop his wired on-stage persona. One night, having fallen over on stage and finding himself spinning around on his back and yet still managing to play his guitar

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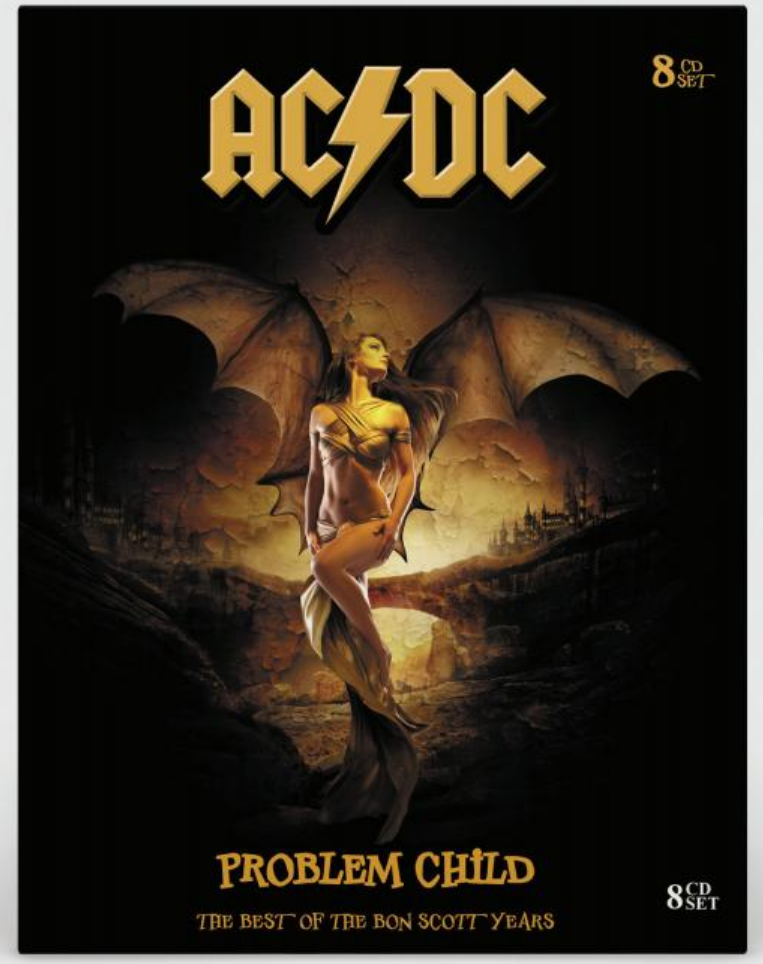


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'I've got the blues in my heart, and the devil in my fingers.' – Angus Young

break, he decided to try it again, and the small audience loved it.

Several early line-up changes helped hone the band even further. Ironically, considering Bon Scott's later appointment, drummer Colin Burgess was sacked for being drunk. Larry Van Kriedt also left the band. Then, during a short spell helping out another local band called Jasper, Malcolm met and recruited drummer Noel Taylor and bass player Neil Smith. However, these new additions didn't tie down the rhythm section as hoped, and were soon replaced by drummer Peter Clack and bass player Rob Bailey. In fact, several drummers were tried out, including Russell Coleman and Ron Carpenter.

Through George's suggestion and contacts, AC/DC got a huge boost when they supported ex-Easybeat vocalist Stevie Wright's new band at a free show at the Sydney Opera House on 26 May 1974 in front of two thousand people. At this time Angus was still only nineteen. As a result of the Sydney show Dennis Laughlin, who became the AC/DC manager, signed them. A relentless touring schedule was undertaken and the band's all-out assault began to pay off – the following month they signed to the influential Albert Productions, who had a distribution deal through EMI. They quickly gained some recognition and released their first single *Can I Sit Next to You Girl* backed with *Rockin' in the Parlour*. Featuring Malcolm on lead, the release was produced by older brother George and his ex-Easybeat colleague Harry Vanda.

At this time, Angus sometimes appeared on stage in a Superman outfit with the letter 'A' on the front standing for Super Angus, or as Spiderman, Zorro or, of course, the schoolboy. The schoolboy outfit was only intended for one night but the look was so well received that it has remained ever since, becoming as much a part of AC/DC's image as its logo.

Despite their shared musical roots, Malcolm and the band were soon at odds with Dave Evans over his increasingly glam stage image, and he split from the group, leaving AC/DC without a vocalist. Vince Lovegrove solved the problem by suggesting to George Young that they look at the now out-of-work Bon Scott, who was busy recovering after his near-death motorbike accident. The Youngs' immediate reaction was that he was too old, but when Bon was invited along to see AC/DC in Adelaide he was so impressed that made his keen enthusiasm for the project known immediately.

Bon Scott was unveiled as their new frontman at his first Sydney gig on 5 October 1974. The abstinent Angus was reportedly horrified by Bon downing up to two bottles of bourbon, along with some speed, coke and a joint, before taking the stage. But once up there, there was no doubt that the band was finally coming together. A two-month tour of Australia was organised, during which Bon began to write lyrics for their first album. When discussing AC/DC's album output it can become confusing, as various different versions were released in Australia in addition to those issued in the UK and Europe. Their first album to be released in Australia was *High Voltage*. With that, the AC/DC that we know were well and truly born. The album, despite being more than thirty years old, is a living reminder of the kind of electricity that has energised the listener ever since.

In April 1975, AC/DC appeared on Australian television's popular *Countdown*. With only seconds to go before taking the stage, Bon still hadn't appeared. Then when he did, right at the last minute, he was dressed as a schoolgirl, complete with blonde wig, tattoos and a disturbingly short skirt. The band could hardly play for laughing and the look on Phil Rudd's face said it all. While Angus duck walked, stripped, and rolled around on the stage doing his 'death of a fly', Bon strutted wolf-like, commanding equal attention through his mere presence.

Pretty soon the public were queued up around the block to witness AC/DC for themselves. Their first headline slot

came at Melbourne Festival Hall just as *High Voltage* had gone gold. It was an event that was filmed for a promotional video intended to introduce them to the UK market. In the meantime the band relocated to Sydney. When they went back into the studio to work on their second album, *T.N.T.* they took with them stronger material – including the classic *It's a Long Way to the Top (If You Wanna Rock 'n' Roll)*, *The Jack*, *Live Wire* and *School Days*. A tour to promote the album was arranged and frequent riots, disturbances and lockouts started to become the norm. A wonderful piece of advertising centred on the slogan, 'AC/DC – Your Mother Won't Like Them'. Bon celebrated this new-found success in his own inimitable way by having another tattoo, jumping into a swimming pool from a dangerously high balcony, riding his motorbike upstairs and drinking champagne out of a frozen turkey at the *King of Pop* television awards. The single *High Voltage* made it to No. 6 in the charts, while the album boasted sales of over seventy thousand copies.

On 8 December 1975 the band hired a flat bed truck and rode through the streets of Melbourne miming to *It's a Long Way to the Top (If You Wanna Rock 'n' Roll)*, complete with Scottish pipers and a bemused crowd of shoppers. It's a memorable piece of video, catching the band just as they were breaking through, and one that helped secure a one-album deal with the major label Atlantic. They followed this by filming *Jailbreak*, a song that Bon later named as his best.

Their success at this time can be measured by the fact that upon its release *T.N.T.*, an album that appeared wrapped in pair of ladies underwear, sold eleven thousand copies in its first week, storming up to No. 2 before eventually going triple gold. To further capitalise on this success the band quickly went back into the studio to work on another album. *Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap* further highlighted the growing strength and power of AC/DC. The album fully captures a band on fire; Phil Rudd's drumming is deceptively simple and shows how a good drummer knows instinctively what not to play as much as what to leave in. The powerhouse behind the band is at its tightest, driving them towards an end result that has really stood the test of time. Above all else it is the confidence of the collective band that comes through loud and clear. Bon Scott had reached a point in his career where he knew exactly how to deliver a song to its full effect. Angus's guitar was growing

'We never care about labels such as punk, psychedelic or whatever else.' – Bon Scott

in stature and Malcolm had once again come up with riff after riff, a trait that characterised the band throughout the next thirty years.

As *Dirty Deeds* broke, AC/DC performed a show in Sydney, marked by Bon carrying a naked girl who had run onto the stage on his shoulders. A UK tour was arranged, with AC/DC due to support Paul Kossoff's Back Street Crawler, but tragedy struck when the troubled ex-Free guitarist died of a heroin overdose. Nevertheless, the tour continued with Geoff Whitehorn filling in. The band arrived in the UK on 6 April 1976, with Bon hoping that this visit would be more successful than his last.

Playing The Red Cow pub in Hammersmith led to gigs at The Nashville Rooms in Fulham's North End Road, and it wasn't long before the legendary John Peel picked up on them and invited them along to record four tracks, which he then helped promote. It was just a matter of time before they made a breakthrough. Suddenly the big UK rock publications *Sounds*, *Melody Maker* and *NME* covered the band, and when AC/DC played The Marquee with Back Street Crawler they all printed rave reviews. By June 1976 they finally headlined The Marquee and headed out for the rest of their tour.

When AC/DC arrived in Glasgow it was an exciting and emotional experience for the Young brothers, who had been born there, whilst Bon went off in search of his roots by visiting Kirriemuir. The Glasgow concert ended in typically raucous fashion, with seats being thrown onto the stage when the crowd realised that the band weren't coming back for

AC/DC in rehearsal for their performance on the American late-night musical variety series The Midnight Special on 6 September 1978.

yet another encore. When they arrived at London's Lyceum on 11 July, Bon was busy celebrating his thirtieth birthday, which had arrived two days before. Needless to say he gave a memorable performance, that coincided with the release of the single *Jailbreak* in Australia. The tour moved on, taking in the Netherlands, Sweden and Austria before they returned to London to appear on the television show *So It Goes*, on which they promoted *Jailbreak*. On 28 August they were once again in the studio recording three tracks for Marc Bolan's *Rollin' Bolan* television show, as Malcolm Young's one-time hero tried to resurrect his career.

This prolific period continued, and AC/DC became regulars at The Marquee, which had become almost their spiritual home, attracting thousand strong crowds several weeks on the trot. With perfect timing, the UK album version of *High Voltage* was launched just as *Dirty Deeds* was released in Australia. AC/DC then moved on through France, Belgium, Switzerland and on into Germany. There they quickly built a huge following, supporting Richie Blackmore's Rainbow.

After a few more gigs in Britain, AC/DC made their triumphant return to Australia and embarked upon a twenty-six-date tour starting at the Myer Music Bowl. As Angus Young's reputation for stripping on stage whilst still playing his Gibson spread, various town mayors decided to ban the group from appearing, much to the disgust of both the band and their fan base. These sixteen Australian dates throughout January–February 1977 were the last time the band appeared in their adopted homeland with Bon Scott.

> 'I've been on the road for fifteen years and I had no intent to stop. We meet a lot of people, we drink lots of stuff and have lots of fun.'
>
> Bon Scott

With barely enough time to go into the studio to record the next album, *Let There Be Rock*, they quickly went back to the UK to start a tour, which kicked off at Edinburgh University on 16 February 1977. As a further sign that the band intended to make London a base, the Young brothers moved into a flat in Ladbroke Grove in the west of the city, meanwhile Bon was staying with his girlfriend of the time, 'Silver' Smith.

Then, another major European tour supporting the disintegrating Black Sabbath took them back to Sweden. Of course, it didn't pass without incident and at one point Sabbath's Geezer Butler drunkenly pulled a knife on Malcolm Young during a particularly lively argument. Sabbath fired AC/DC from the tour, and this was sharply followed by Mark Evans' departure following disagreements with Angus. The band wasted no time and quickly recruited ex-Bandit bass player Cliff Williams as his replacement. Williams was older than the Youngs, and being born in 1949 was nearer the age of Bon Scott, with whom he quickly formed a solid friendship.

*Let There Be Rock* was released in the States in July and a tour was planned. Firstly there was the not insignificant problem of Bon's visa application, which had to be sorted out following his earlier

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'All the songs we do are basically about one of three things: booze, sex or rock 'n' roll.' – **Bon Scott**

drugs bust. When they did arrive they went to Austin, Texas before moving on to The Electric Ballroom in Dallas, a show that went out live on local radio. The tour came to an end on 16 August at Madison, Wisconsin. It was the day that Elvis had died and yet they still managed to get the downbeat audience up and rocking.

Sadly, further tragedy in the music world quickly followed, with Malcolm's much-admired Marc Bolan dying in a car accident, and Lynyrd Skynyrd's fatal plane crash tearing a hole in the business. Little did anyone know that AC/DC were destined to add to the rock 'n' roll list of the departed in short measure. However, there were quite large hints that Bon knew his lifestyle was catching up on him, and when he was interviewed for the New York rock magazine *Punk*, he stated that the meaning of life is 'To have as good a time and as short as possible.' A statement that proved horribly accurate.

As AC/DC took America by storm they were invited to open for Johnny Winter, and caught the eye of Kiss frontman Gene Simmons, who booked them to support them in December. When they finally returned to Europe they toured Finland, Sweden, Germany – where the reaction was typically manic – as well as Switzerland and Belgium. It was whilst playing at Kontich in Belgium that another riot prompted the police to storm the stage. This event inspired Bon to write *Bedlam in Belgium*, which later appeared on the *Flick of the Switch* album. A further single, *Let There Be Rock* backed by *Problem Child*, was released in Europe, followed by the album in October. This was promoted with another twenty-date onslaught on the expectant United Kingdom. 25–26 October saw the band play two sell out nights at Hammersmith Odeon, not far from the more humble surroundings of The Red Cow pub where they had played not so long before. Another chance to give more exposure to the AC/DC sound came the following night when the band was filmed performing, transmitted on the BBC and radio several days later.

> 'We just want to make the walls cave in and the ceiling collapse. Music is meant to be played as loudly as possible, really raw and punchy, and I'll punch out anyone who doesn't like it the way I do.'
>
> **Bon Scott**

In November AC/DC returned to the States to further promote *Let There Be Rock*. This time they supported Canadian band Rush in New York State before teaming up with UFO for three more dates. By the time they reached Chicago, they had received rave reviews, mostly focusing on the antics of Angus, the like of which hadn't been seen before, and Bon Scott. Their chaotic showmanship was counterbalanced by the more restrained input from Malcolm's superb rhythm guitar, with the whole riot underpinned by the developing partnership between Phil Rudd and Cliff Williams.

'It keeps you fit – the alcohol, nasty women, sweat on stage, bad food – it's all very good for you.' – **Bon Scott**

Opening for Kiss, Aerosmith, Blue Oyster Cult, Styx and Cheap Trick, they further enhanced their reputation of being a feared band to follow. Now it was time to record another album, and once the tour had finished they went back to Sydney to start work. What emerged is one of the highlights of the AC/DC catalogue, the massive *Powerage*.

As *Powerage* hit the UK shops the band went on the road again. The *Rock 'n' Roll Damnation* single steadily climbed the charts and peaked at No. 24, resulting in their first appearance on the mainstream television show *Top of the Pops*. Warming up for the tour they took in Colchester's University of Essex, an event captured on film. The student crowd look almost stunned as the decibel level rips holes through those at the front. It is hot, sweaty, crammed, noisy and everything rock should be.

The gig was also the first airing for *Sin City*, introduced by Bon saying, 'If you want blood, you get it.' Off goes Angus, by now melting in sweat, Phil hits the drums with such power that they nearly implode. Bon gives a typically charismatic performance playing to the camera, the crowd and the band.

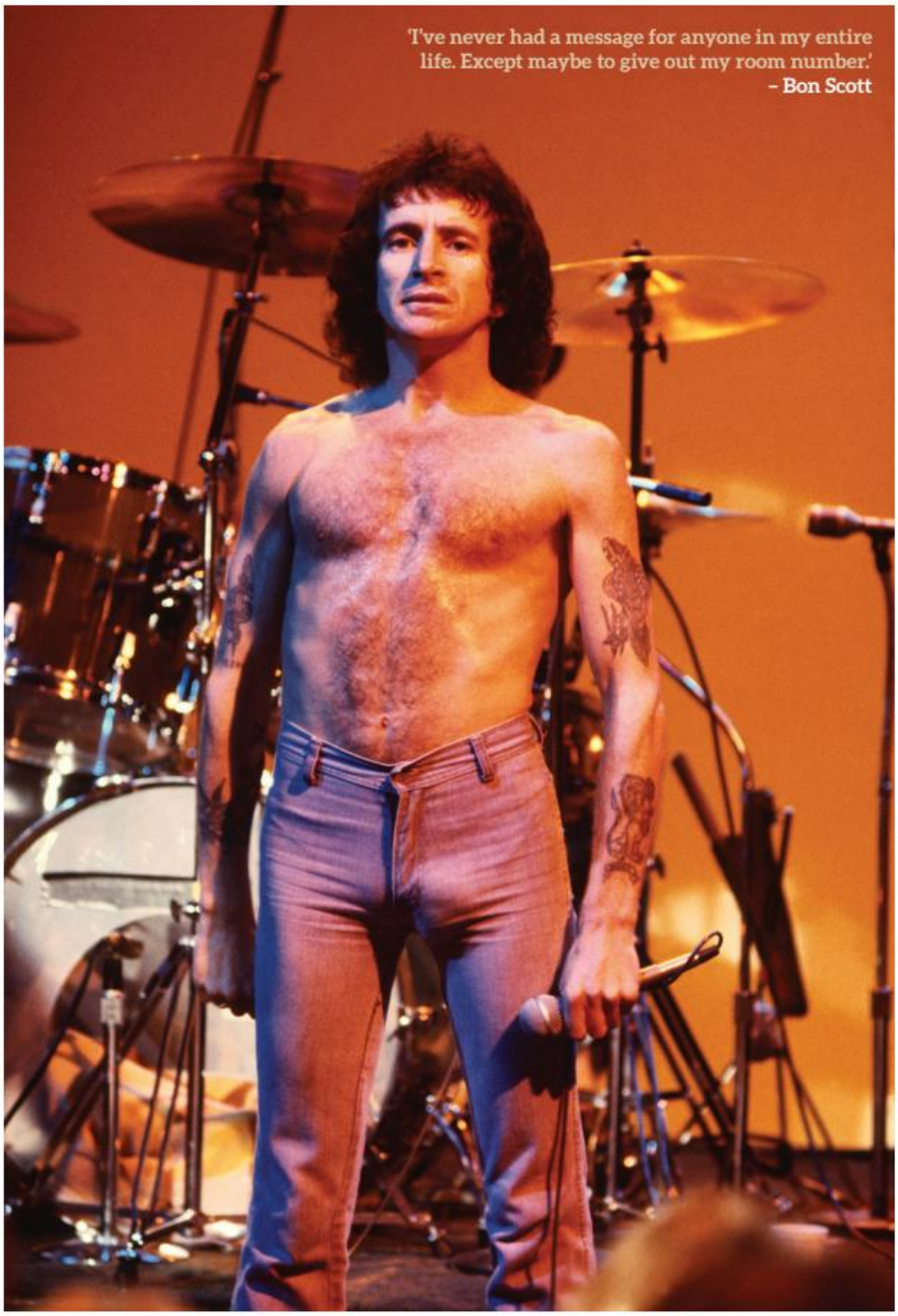
This tour was also captured on a live album, released in the UK in October 1978 and in the US the following month. *If You Want Blood You've Got It* was recorded for fans to treat their neighbours to a full-on AC/DC live experience. The crowd reaction when the band takes to the stage says it all, and illustrates just how huge the band had become.

**'Every guitarist I would cross paths with would tell me that I should have a flashy guitar. I used to say, "Why? Mine works, doesn't it? It's a piece of wood and six strings, and it works."'**

**Angus Young**

When the band took the *Powerage* tour to the States in June they supported Alice Cooper in Virginia, then went on to play a staggering sixty-seven dates appearing with the likes of Montrose, Thin Lizzy, Aerosmith and Rush. The high point of the tour was an appearance in front of seventy thousand music fans at Oakland near San Francisco along with Aerosmith, Van Halen, Foreigner and The Pat Travers Band. Although, when they took to the stage at 10:30 a.m. it was a sign that, in the States at least, they were still considered to be the new scruffy boys on the block. Nevertheless, they still managed to ignite the massive crowd and set the day up nicely for the following acts.

The tour started a close friendship between Alice Cooper and Bon Scott, who hit it off straight away. Yet, is also notable for the band being turned off for playing too loud in Detroit, resulting in Malcolm punching the promoter. By October they were back in Europe doing a further sixteen-date tour of the continent. Then, they hardly took their foot off the gas, and returned to England to play another seventeen dates. How Angus and Bon



'I've never had a message for anyone in my entire life. Except maybe to give out my room number.'
– Bon Scott

kept going is remarkable. The band relied on their full-octane energy levels to deliver. Angus of course did not drink, but what Bon was doing to himself on top of this pounding schedule could only really take him one way. When they again sold out the Hammersmith Odeon for both nights it was reported that they could have filled it for a week, such was AC/DC's popularity.

Just as *Powerage* was going gold in the States it was decided that this was the time to take the band back into the studio for a seventh album. A switch in producers was suggested by Atlantic, and both George Young and Harry Vanda were dropped to make room for Eddie Kramer. Kramer came with a huge reputation, built largely at Atlantic, having produced Jimi Hendrix and Led Zeppelin, among many others. This decision caused much concern within the AC/DC camp. Effectively, Malcolm and Angus were being asked to fire not only their own brother, but also someone who had produced six successful albums and had played a major part in creating the AC/DC legend. It was not an easy decision to take. George left with valuable advice to the band to not change what they did best: high voltage rock 'n' roll.

The band set off for Miami to start recording – but all was not well. Kramer wanted to introduce keys to the sound, and the band's obvious lack of enthusiasm translated into some out of character, lacklustre recordings. Kramer was sacked and replaced with Robert 'Mutt' Lange. The band re-located to the Roundhouse Studios in London and began work on what would become their career-defining album, *Highway to Hell*.

Robert 'Mutt' Lange was, at that point, largely untried and producing a heavy rock band was certainly new territory for him. Atlantic could see that the band was happy again, and the early tapes sent from the studio convinced them that it was a risk worth taking. Some concern was expressed at Atlantic over the album title *Highway to Hell*. However, it was a fear that proved unfounded, and the album became the most successful AC/DC release to date.

The opening track was single material, but before either it or the album was released the band went back to the States to introduce the new material amongst their already impressive set list.

Once again they found themselves heavily booked, with the fifty-three dates scheduled. It was a hard and demanding tour, and they partied as hard as they rocked. For Bon it was the stuff of dreams. The women would literally line up for him and even though the crowds grew and the organisation would plot their every move in and out of gigs, they were still accessible. Bon would not have it any other way.

By July it was time for *Highway to Hell* to be unleashed and the album soon went platinum as sales took off. The album stormed into the Top 10 of the UK album chart, and did well in the frenzied rock lands of Germany and the Netherlands. On 1 September they opened with The Who at Nuremburg, Germany along with Molly Hatchet, Cheap Trick and the Scorpions. As if they hadn't toured hard enough, they were then booked to return to the States, playing Oakland once again.

The endless touring, heavy drinking and partying was taking its toll on Bon, and when they embarked upon ten dates with southern rockers Molly Hatchet, his lifestyle was starting to cause concern. It was physically impossible for anyone, even someone as fit as Bon, to continue this pace without a break.

The relentless touring continued in the following months, but the hard work was paying off and AC/DC were soon told that *Highway to Hell* had sold over half a million copies in the short time since its release.

Moving once more through Europe they played two shows in December at the Pavillion De Paris supported by the up and coming British band Judas Priest. Both concerts were filmed and released as part of the rockumentary video *Let There Be Rock*. As a 'moment in time' study of a band on the rise it's fascinating stuff.

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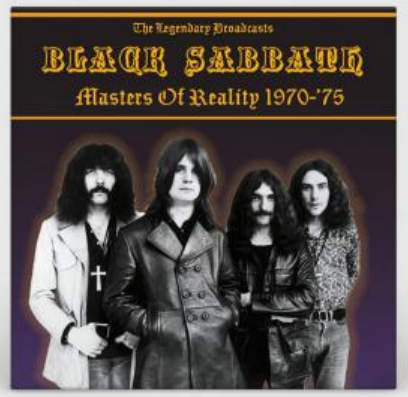


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**AC/DC in performance on The Midnight Special in California on 6 September 1978.**
'I don't like to play above or below people's heads. Basically, I just like to get up in front of a crowd and rip it up.' – **Angus Young**

Powerful live footage is intermingled with some revealing behind-the-scenes sequences and interviews, which sit alongside some almost home-movie style sections of the band relaxing.

After Paris and the two extra Hammersmith shows the band did four more sell out dates with the Pirates – which coincided with the news that their latest single *Touch Too Much* was giving them their breakthrough on the radio at last. Ready for some well-earned rest the band took a break for Christmas back home in sunny Australia. Sadly it was to be Bon's last ever visit. Facing another year of relentless touring something had to give – but little did anyone realise just how low the sand in the hourglass had run.

By mid-January AC/DC were already back on tour playing more dates in England. After stopping in Cannes to receive awards for both *If You Want Blood* and *Highway to Hell*, they travelled on to Madrid to appear on the television show *Aplauso* performing *Highway to Hell*, *The Girl's Got Rhythm* and *Beating Around the Bush*. It was Bon's last ever live appearance. A press conference was held the next morning before Bon flew back to Paris to record *Ride On* with his mates in the band Trust, but tragedy was now only days away.

> 'We're a rock group. We're noisy, rowdy, sensational and weird.'
>
> Angus Young

The story often told is this. Bon had rented a flat on the fourth floor of Ashley Court in London's Victoria. On the night of 18 February 1980, he went out with a mysterious player in the tragedy called Alistair Kinnear. They decided to go to the Music Machine in North London's Camden Town area. Kinnear picked Bon up late in the evening and drove him off towards Camden. Bon was drinking heavily by even his own legendary standards. He made full use of the behind-stage bar and was seen

downing numerous large whiskies. At around 3 a.m. on 19 February they left the club and headed off towards Bon's Victoria flat. By this time, according to Kinnear, Bon had fallen asleep in a heavy stupor. On arriving outside, Kinnear went up to Bon's flat and opened the door using the keys he had taken from the singer's jeans. Leaving the door open, he went back down to the car and tried to get him out. Unfortunately, he couldn't lift Bon on his own and he soon gave up, especially when the outside lobby door closed.

Kinnear phoned Bon's ex-girlfriend, Margaret 'Silver' Smith, and she suggested that he take Bon back to his own flat in East Dulwich on the south side of the river. How he thought he would get Bon up his own stairs is not known, and upon their arrival at 67 Overhill Road he found that once again he couldn't lift Bon out of the car, a small Renault 5. He lowered the back of the front seat, put a blanket over Bon and left him to sleep it off. He then went up to his flat and wrote a note telling Bon where the flat was for when he woke up.

Kinnear then went to sleep until 11 a.m. the next morning, when he received a call from a friend. He asked his friend to check outside to make sure Bon was OK. The friend had a quick look, but apparently could not see him in the car. Kinnear went back to sleep and didn't wake until approximately 7:45 p.m., when he walked down to his car and found Bon dead where he had left him. He drove him to the nearby King's College Hospital – but Bon was long gone. The news moved fast to Peter Mensch, the band's manager, and on until it reached Angus, who rang around the rest of the band, starting with Malcolm. Peter Mensch drove to the hospital to identify the body. Malcolm was left with the terrible job of telling Bon's family back in Australia before they saw it on the news. Bon was thirty-three. His death was certified as being caused by 'acute alcohol poisoning', and was signed off as 'misadventure'. As the news started filtering out through the radio and then onto television news, the band were left in a state of total disbelief.

For years the story has become clouded amid speculation about the actual circumstances of Bon's death. Alistair Kinnear quickly disappeared from the scene and did not resurface for some time. Bon's apparent drug use was suggested, but the autopsy on 22 February made no mention of any drugs being found in his blood stream. The autopsy merely reported that Bon had at least half a bottle of whisky in his stomach. The same day, the caretaker at Bon's block of flats in Ashley Court reported finding the door to Number 15 wide open, which supported Kinnear's story. Many years later Alistair Kinnear stated that Silver Smith had mentioned to him that Bon had been receiving treatment for liver damage at the time of his death, but had not been very good at keeping the appointments.

Bon's body was flown back to Australia. His funeral took place on 1 March 1980, following a church service in Fremantle, it was attended only by those closest to him and a handful of fans. He was cremated and his ashes were marked with a plaque that is still one of the most visited sites in Australia, even today.

Malcolm and Angus were too shocked to discuss what their plans, if any, were for the band, and were slightly taken aback when Bon's father told them at the funeral to get another singer and get back out there. He felt it was what Bon not only would have wanted, but also what he would have expected them to do. On returning to England it took the brothers several weeks to get back together. It proved almost therapeutic, even though the gap left by Bon Scott must have seemed impossible to fill. They decided that they didn't want a Bon imitator for fear of becoming a parody of their former selves. They wanted a frontman who was his own person with his own image and sound, who could fill Bon's shoes without being fazed by the task.

It is the stuff of rock legend that just a few weeks on from fitting vinyl roofs onto old Ford Escorts in Newcastle, Brian Johnson found himself on a plane flying to Barbados with AC/DC, employed as their new singer. It was beyond his wildest dreams and with it, of course, came the reality check of having to appear in front of the rock-hungry hordes of AC/DC fans. Whether they would accept him as the new frontman remained to be seen.

As we all know now, Brian Johnson shone in the role of AC/DC frontman, and brought a fresh outlook to a band that had lost so much. Whether he surpassed Bon's distinctive talent is another matter, and despite the admirable job he has done, Bon Scott will remain the only true frontman to many AC/DC fans. Whomever you prefer it is certain that there will never be another Bon Scott, and his inimitable zest for life and passion for rock 'n' roll are sorely missed to this day.

# The Kinks

## From Kinks to Arthur

If there is one band that soundtracks the sixties perfectly it is the Kinks. Across a series of brilliant singles and albums, they eloquently detailed an iconic decade for an entire generation of British teenagers. Here we explore the band's journey from their chaotic early years to the final departure of Pete Quaife in late 1969.

**The classic Kinks line-up saw Ray Davies' songwriting genius complemented by his younger brother Dave's fantastic, proto-punk guitar playing, backed by the powerful and innovative rhythm section of bass player Pete Quaife and drummer Mick Avory. The siblings were at each other's throats for a good stretch of the band's career – a creative tension that was key to the band's sound. However, it was a tension that manifested in fights between band members, and one that perhaps prevented them from becoming the second-most successful band of the sixties.**

The Kinks had a bumpy ride, which saw great successes and disappointing flops. They made bad mistakes, but also wrote brilliant songs; from the initial flurry of pure rock excitement to their more mellow output in the late sixties. A time when Davies' songwriting really flourished, with sharp lyrics and music that defined Englishness in a way that was incredibly influential in the following decades.

Unlike other outfits, the band made no pretence of harmony amid the ranks. They spoke openly to the press about hating each other. At one famous concert, drummer Mick Avory split open guitarist Dave Davies' head by hurling a drum pedal, and then fled the venue, fearing he had just committed murder. The band members were anarchic, neurotic, seemingly possessed by demons, but led by an introverted man of relative sobriety. They dressed in outlandish clothes, drank and drugged themselves silly (apart from Ray) and fought like wild dogs.

Despite their magnificent records, the Kinks remained terminally unhip. It's not hard to see why – Ray Davies was never taken in by fads and fashions, or, indeed, his competitors. Such was his talent; it was they who looked to him. The likes of Lennon and Townshend often stole from him – and admitted it. But all bands have to start somewhere, and this is the story of the Kinks' beginnings.

In January 1964 the Kinks were signed to Pye Records, who released two singles from their first recording session, both of which flopped. The first was a weak cover version of *Long Tall Sally* and the second was Ray's *You Still Want Me*, which sold only 127 copies in the UK.

The failure of the first two singles failed to derail the band, who managed to grab plenty of press attention with their name and a bunch of photo sessions living up to their 'kinkiness'. First there was the band looking suitably kinky brandishing whips and wearing long boots in a full-page advert in the *NME*. Larry Page then got them onto *Ready Steady Go!* where he paid kids to pretend they were fans and charge at the band outside waving Kinks banners. It was an attempt to recreate a mini Beatlemania riot. They were then hustled into a whole run of teen magazines as the hip, sharp-dressing, kinky new band on the block.

Next, they pulled back from the kinky hype and were presented as sharp mods about town, but with a distinctly kinky flavour. This was something with which they seemed more comfortable, apart from Ray, who was far too individualistic to be told what to do by anybody. Finally, after a tour with Dave Clarke, the band fell upon an image that they felt comfortable with – the arrival of the hunting jackets. This was a look that the Kinks settled on for the first phase of their career.

**The Kinks in performance on the British television programme Ready Steady Go! on 7 February 1964. Left to right: Pete Quaife, Dave Davies, Mick Avory and Ray Davies.**

Despite the band's extensive live work and the attendant publicity, chart success remained elusive. By May 1964 they looked like they were on the fast track to becoming another casualty on the great pop scrapheap. Pye Records warned them that if they did not have a hit with their next single then they were going to be dropped. Thankfully they had an ace up their sleeve: *You Really Got Me*.

*You Really Got Me* hit No. 1 in the UK and No. 6 in the USA, and the Kinks no longer had to pay fans to scream for them. They were now in constant demand and their lives became a never-ending round of interviews, TV appearances, recording sessions and live shows. The band was now hurried into the studio to record their debut album, simply entitled *The Kinks*.

Released in September 1964, much of *The Kinks* consisted of third-rate R&B or Chuck Berry covers. The album was notably flat, although once in a while its listeners may stumble upon Ray Davies' latent brilliance with a song such as *Stop Your Sobbing*, later covered by the Pretenders led by Chrissie Hynde, who became Ray's second wife.

After a whirlwind of touring the band released another album, *Kinda Kinks*, just six months later, in March 1965, and a third, *The Kinks Kontroversy*, that very December. Three albums in just over a year would seem crazy in today's music world, but back then albums and singles were entirely different entities. Singles were viewed as all-important as they best gauged a band's popularity with the general public.

As soon as the album was recorded, the Kinks were back on the road supporting Billie J. Kramer. It was a tour of wild escapades and constantly screaming girls. Pop music was at an all-time peak. Never again would it attract as much wild excitement as it did in 1964, inspired by the Beatles' extraordinary success. Pop was reaching places and people it would never normally have touched. The Kinks were beneficiaries of this phenomenon, and were also capable of writing songs with speed and skill, as the swift germination of their follow-up to *You Really Got Me* proved.

In a call midway though the tour, their publisher asked Ray to write a follow-up to their massive hit. He popped by the office, strummed a few chords, and then arranged the song in a soundcheck the next day. A couple of days after that they were in the studio recording *All Day and All of the Night*.

Recorded in three hours, *All Day and All of the Night* hit the charts as *You Really Got Me* started its slide down the Top 40. It was a chart overlap that saw the Kinks set out on an almost unbroken fourteen months in the Top 40 charts. The work rate of bands during the sixties was frantic. They were either constantly on the road or rushed around TV studios,

'Some of those early Kinks songs, we were barely in tune.' – Dave Davies

then on their days off were expected to record more songs. The record labels were in a blind panic, fearing that the bubble could burst at any moment. Thus, as soon as *All Day and All of the Night* hit the Top 3, the Kinks were ushered back into the studio to record an EP.

A month after hitting the top with *All Day and All of the Night*, the Kinks released their next single, *Tired of Waiting for You*. The song had originally been recorded for the first album, but producer Shel Talmy had been astute enough to hold it back for a single. The song was an early Ray Davies original that he had recorded for a demo.

*Tired of Waiting for You* was a big leap forward for Ray. A deceptively simple song, it betrayed a sensitivity and songwriting skill that belied his youth. It was also the last of the early Kinks hard-rock singles. Even without the cranked-up wildness of their first two singles, *Tired of Waiting for You* still packs a punch. It became the band's second No. 1 in the UK and their biggest ever hit in the USA.

1965 found the Kinks living the rock 'n' roll lifestyle at full tilt, especially Dave. At eighteen he was a young kid on the block and had set about a three-year partying binge. The touring was a blur of wild nights, fights, riots, screaming girls and madness.

1965 was a significant year in the Kinks' history, for it was then that the band travelled to America for a lengthy tour. They had already scored three Top 10 hits in the States and went there as big stars. Their appearance on *Shindig!*, the key American pop-music TV show that celebrated the lightweight end of pop, underlined their natural 'punkiness'. Their live show, honed by eighteen months of rigorous touring, was just lewd and rude enough to excite Middle America. Their televisual presence underlined the difference between the two brothers – a difference that was at the core of the band. The tension between Dave's raw-edged feeling and Ray's brooding intellectuality presented a radically different kind of performance to what the US were used to. The Kinks had arrived and the Kinks were wild.

This was no act. The Kinks had become completely out of control. The fractious inter-band relationships, youthfulness and abrasive personalities saw them play a chaotic, anarchic tour across the States as they firmly pressed the self-destruct button. At one gig they played *You Really Got Me* over and over. In between gigs the band's members were not getting on. They travelled at opposite ends of the coach and would stand at opposite sides of the stage. The atmosphere was electric; daggers were drawn.

The tour culminated in disaster when the band fell out with a promoter in Sacramento, and Ray also got into an argument at a Los Angeles TV studio

The Kinks perform once again on Ready, Steady, Go! in 1965. From left to right: Ray Davies, Dave Davies, Mick Avory and Pete Quaife.

and punched his antagoniser – a top union official.

'I remember we were doing a television spot', Ray later said, 'and this guy kept going on at me, "When the commies overrun Britain, you're really going to want to come round here aren't you?" I just turned round and hit him, about three times.'

This was one of several rumoured reasons why the Kinks wound up being banned from playing in America, but Mick Avory summed it up eloquently by claiming that the ban was due to a combination of bad management, bad luck and bad behaviour. The Kinks were banned from touring America for four-and-a-half years, a move that pretty well finished their career as a 'super-band'. By the time they got back to the States, the sixties were all but over, and pop had moved in a different direction.

The effect on Ray was to prove immense. Hurt by the ban, Ray reacted in protest by ditching his American musical influences – R&B and soul music – and focusing instead on his British musical roots. Through hard work and perseverance, Ray hit upon a style that was very much his own, and one that he spent the next four years perfecting. His songs became richly melodic, tinged with a musical nostalgia that was partly derived from their British musical roots and partly from his lyrics.

Ray had a curiosity about ordinary people with their extraordinary thoughts and behaviour patterns. Coupled with his cynical mindset, this allowed him to conjure up a series of social satires and striking portraits. He took his inspiration from all sources. After getting into an argument with a fashionable young man at a party, he went home and wrote *Dedicated Follower of Fashion*. He holidayed in a swanky hotel in Torquay and mixed with the toffs, which prompted the song *A Well Respected Man*. His father's secretive signing-on is remembered in the song *Get In Line*.

**'The more we played, the more we wanted to do it. And it got to a stage where we wanted to do it all the time.'**

*Ray Davies*

In 1965, instead of licking their wounds after their American experience, the Kinks released their best single yet, *See My Friends*.

*See My Friends* was a remarkable record for two reasons. It was the first single to incorporate Indian music into British pop, an accolade mistakenly awarded to the Beatles. The influence arose when Ray stopped off in India on his way to Australia for a tour.

'I couldn't sleep,' he wrote in *X-Ray*, 'partly from excitement at being on a mysterious continent, but mainly because of the cockroaches and ants crawling around, so I got up and watched the sun rise on the beach. It was there that I heard the chanting of native fishermen as they carried their nets to work. It was a sound that for some indescribable reason was immediately personal to me, and it was to be very influential in my songwriting.'

The song was influential in other people's work as well, such as Pete Townshend of The Who: '*See My Friends* was the next time I pricked up my ears and thought, "God, he's done it again. He's invented something new." That was the first reasonable use of the drone – far, far better than anything the Beatles did and far, far earlier… On our first album there's a couple of songs that were directly influenced by that song. *The Good's Gone*, for example.'

In interviews at the time, Ray talked about the song being about a youth

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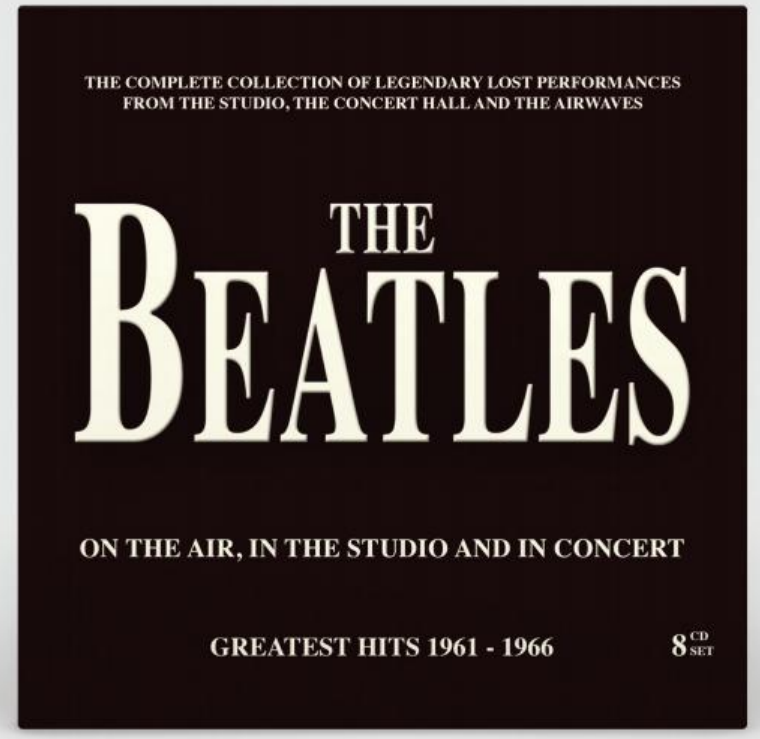


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**The Kinks on Top of the Pops on 8 December 1966.**
'Give the People what they want – and they'll get what they deserve.' – **Ray Davies**

unsure of his sexuality, about campness, a closet sexuality that he had experienced in the music industry. Such subtle feelings were not particularly welcome in the big lads' club that was rock 'n' roll.

The single charted, but did not sell particularly well. To re-establish the lost ground, Davies next presented the band with, *Till the End of the Day*, backed with *Where Have All the Good Times Gone?*, a magnificent B-Side whose subject matter was completely out of sync with a country in the midst of the Swinging Sixties.

Hitting his stride, Ray also came up with another Kinks classic, *A Well Respected Man*, which formed part of the frightfully titled *Kwyet Kinks* EP, which showed the band still on the move stylistically.

*A Well Respected Man* took a swipe at the rigid social background of the middle classes and juxtaposed them with the sexual desire that was always there, just below the surface. It was the first real classic Ray Davies social commentary, again a hugely influential approach to songwriting that others would copy repeatedly during the sixties.

'I did it because it gave fun back to our outfit,' Ray later remarked. 'Everyone was smiling at each other again and happy. But it's totally different from the other stuff. I didn't think it would work at first, but it did.'

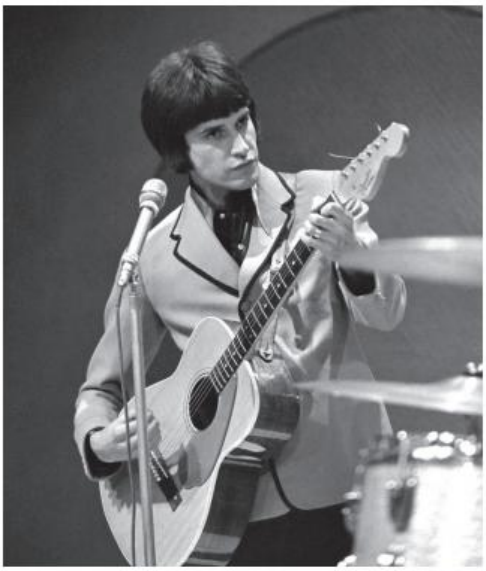
At this time the Kinks broke away from Larry Page and his publishing house, which they had outgrown. They were already negotiating a minefield of difficult business relationships, and it would take several years of court cases to sort out their affairs. If there was ever an example of how to mess up the business part of professional musicianship completely, this was it.

A sensitive soul, Ray now found the merry-go-round of success spinning at such a rate of knots that it became damaging to his mental health. For a while the songs dried up, until songwriter Mort Schuman visited him and handed him some sound advice. Ray was heading for a breakdown – and a serious one at that.

In 1977 he told *NME*, 'I was a zombie. I'd been on the go from when we first made it and I was completely out of my mind. I went to sleep and I woke up a week later with a moustache. I don't know what happened to me. I'd run into the West End with my money stuffed down my socks. I tried to punch my press agent, I was chased down Denmark Street by the police…'

Ray managed to complete a Scandinavian tour and was then told to rest up while a stand-in took his place for the tour of Belgium. At the end of his recuperation he wrote four songs: *End of the Season*, *Sunny Afternoon*, the self-explanatory *Too Much On My Mind* and *I'm Not Like Everybody Else*.

As he pointed out in *X-Ray*, many of these songs seemed to have their roots in his circumstances at that point in his life. They were, he explained, 'songs about a man who had become wealthy, and, after travelling the world for the first time returned home to buy a house and settle down. It was a character that was outside my experience and background, but the



Lead guitarist Dave Davies in performance in 1967.

only way I could interpret how I felt was through a dusty fallen aristocrat who had come from old money, as opposed to the wealth I had made for myself.'

In summer 1966, the band recorded *Face to Face*, their best album to date. It included such gems as *Sunny Afternoon* and *Too Much On My Mind*. There was also *Dandy* and the clever if somewhat frantic *Party Line*. The touching emotions of *Rosy Won't You Please Come Home* were derived from a poem to one of Ray's sisters, who then lived in Australia, whilst *Too Much On My Mind* reflected the mental upheavals he had recently experienced. There were two songs about houses – *Residence for Sale* and *A House in the Country*, no doubt spurred on by his continued efforts to buy something bigger somewhere better for his family – but the album's two standout songs, *A Rainy Day in June* and *Fancy*, were actually masterworks of atmospherics.

The album recorded, the Kinks were back on the road again. Of course, things didn't run smoothly. Pete Quaife was injured in a car crash in Morecambe, meaning he had to be replaced for *Top of the Pops* by stand-in John Dalton. Quaife decided not to return to the band, half-recuperating and half-retiring from the intensity and bust-ups of life with the Kinks. Dalton stepped into the breach.

It was a bad time for the band – Quaife was not a songwriter, but he had been a key member of the group. He was the one member who everyone got on with, the group's anchorman as well as being a rock-solid bass player.

At the same time, they pulled in a notorious New York music lawyer Alan Klein to renegotiate their contract with Pye. In a typical sixties contract, Pye was paying the band peanuts. Klein tore into the record label, leaving negotiations dragging on for months and delaying the release of *Face to Face*, which was the best Kinks album yet. With its lead single *Sunny Afternoon* at No. 1, the album was left waiting in the wings and missed its moment of glory, a typical commercial disaster for the band.

The next single to appear, in November 1966, was *Dead End Street*. Ray later stated, 'I wasn't being fooled by all the euphoria that was around. People were taking a lot of drugs because they didn't want to see. I was trying to see things, but people rejected it. Even though it was quite a big hit, they rejected the idea of it.'

A period of relaxation for the band then followed before they reappeared with a new single in April 1967, *Mr Pleasant*, another of the jaunty character songs that Ray had become so adept at writing. At just twenty-two he was about to release the record many consider to be his masterpiece.

Upon its release in May 1967, *Waterloo Sunset* shot straight into the Top 10. With its descending bass line, sinewy riff, colourful acoustic guitars, gorgeous harmonies and plaintive lyrics, the song is the jewel in the crown of the Kinks' catalogue. It has never gone out of fashion – in 2005 it placed second to The Jam's *Down in the Tube Station* in a poll of great London songs. Davies noted, 'Nothing against The Jam, but the people who vote in these polls tend to watch Eastenders…'

The Kinks appear on Granada's television programme Piccadilly Palace programme on Saturday 29 July 1967.

This was a song so cinematic and beautiful it is hard to believe that it is all crammed into less than three minutes of pop bliss. It simply oozes atmosphere, capturing the geography and the time perfectly. It's like a painting, a true work of pop art. *Waterloo Sunset* is an awesome pop song and one that will be played forever by anyone who wants to capture the spirit of that time. The single was another massive worldwide hit, yet again underlining Davies' ability to write a great pop song that defined the times.

Although the gap between albums had now stretched to a more comfortable twelve months, the self-deprecating title of the next album *Something Else* suggested that the Kinks may have viewed the LP as simply more product. However, the album was a showcase for some of Ray's most remarkable songs, while Dave demonstrated an unexpected talent for songwriting. Ray was, by then, acting as producer, having set a precedent by recording *Waterloo Sunset* without Shel Talmy.

With the Musicians' Union ban on performing in America still in force, the album dug further into the seam of Englishness mined on *Face to Face*. Had the Kinks been allowed to perform in the States, their music would doubtless have developed differently. Unfortunately, not even the inclusion of a brace of Top 3 singles could push the album any higher than No. 35 in the charts. Songs about cigarettes, tea and envious schoolboys flew in the face of fashion in 1967.

**'Ray is very secretive about his ideas – why not, the times that the Kinks have been ripped off, especially in the early years, it makes you a little bit cautious about telling anybody what you're doing. And that's understandable.'**

*Dave Davies*

However, the songwriting is again faultless. Ray had hit a groove and come up with yet another set of songs that dragged big meanings from the mundane, or used characters to explore situations. It was a series of songs that combined sixties rock 'n' roll with music hall and a myriad of other styles, which never let up in the imagination stakes.

The following year, Ray created what is now considered to be the band's finest work, *The Village Green Preservation Society*. Prior to its release the band had issued *Live at Kelvin Hall*, which was basically an album of girls screaming with the Kinks playing somewhere in the background. This was the fate of all the major sixties groups when it came to concert performances. The band would walk onstage, strike up a number and be instantly drowned out by a sea of screams. Consequently, the band's musicianship suffered terribly. It is why many opted to spend more time in the studio than onstage. This turn of events suited a prolific writer like Ray perfectly, although at the same time the man had much to worry about.

In 1968 Ray initiated a court action over missing royalties, which would drag on for years. At the same time he found himself seriously pondering his next musical move. After all, he had written *Waterloo Sunset*. Where could he go now? How could he top that record?

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The Kinks in 1969.

On top of these concerns, the band's refusal to engage with contemporary culture had seriously dented their popularity. Even though John Lennon raved about the Kinks' new single, the effortlessly camp *Wonderboy*, released in June 1968, the record flopped badly. The accompanying tour saw the despondent band getting blown off the stage by the ascendant Tremoloes most nights. The two EPs that had been released to capitalise on the tour had also stiffed. There was a general feeling between the band's management and the tour promoters that the Kinks' glory days were over, and that maybe it was time to pack it in.

The band, however, were made of sterner stuff and hit back with their next single *Days*, one of their classics. A complex examination of human relationships, *Days* not only had a fantastic melody, but also looked at the way that every relationship is dominated by the brooding thought of parting, suggesting that loss is at the heart of them all. Ray said of it, 'It's like saying goodbye to somebody, and then afterwards feeling the fear that you are now alone.' Although not reaching No. 1, *Days* put the Kinks back into the upper reaches of the charts.

The Kinks then decided to undertake some ill-advised tours, such as a jaunt around Swedish folkparks, followed by a string of gigs in working men's clubs in the North of England. The touring and sudden dip in fortunes left the Kinks demoralised. Ray fell into a depression just as work on their new album began. The band decided that the answer to their problem was to join together and protect each other, to lay aside their combative nature, gather behind their leader and support him in whatever he wanted to do. Ray recalled, 'The band came on board and they tried to help me. I'm extremely grateful to them for doing that.'

**'We've always had our hardcore fans. But the general public has a love/hate thing about the Kinks.'**

*Dave Davies*

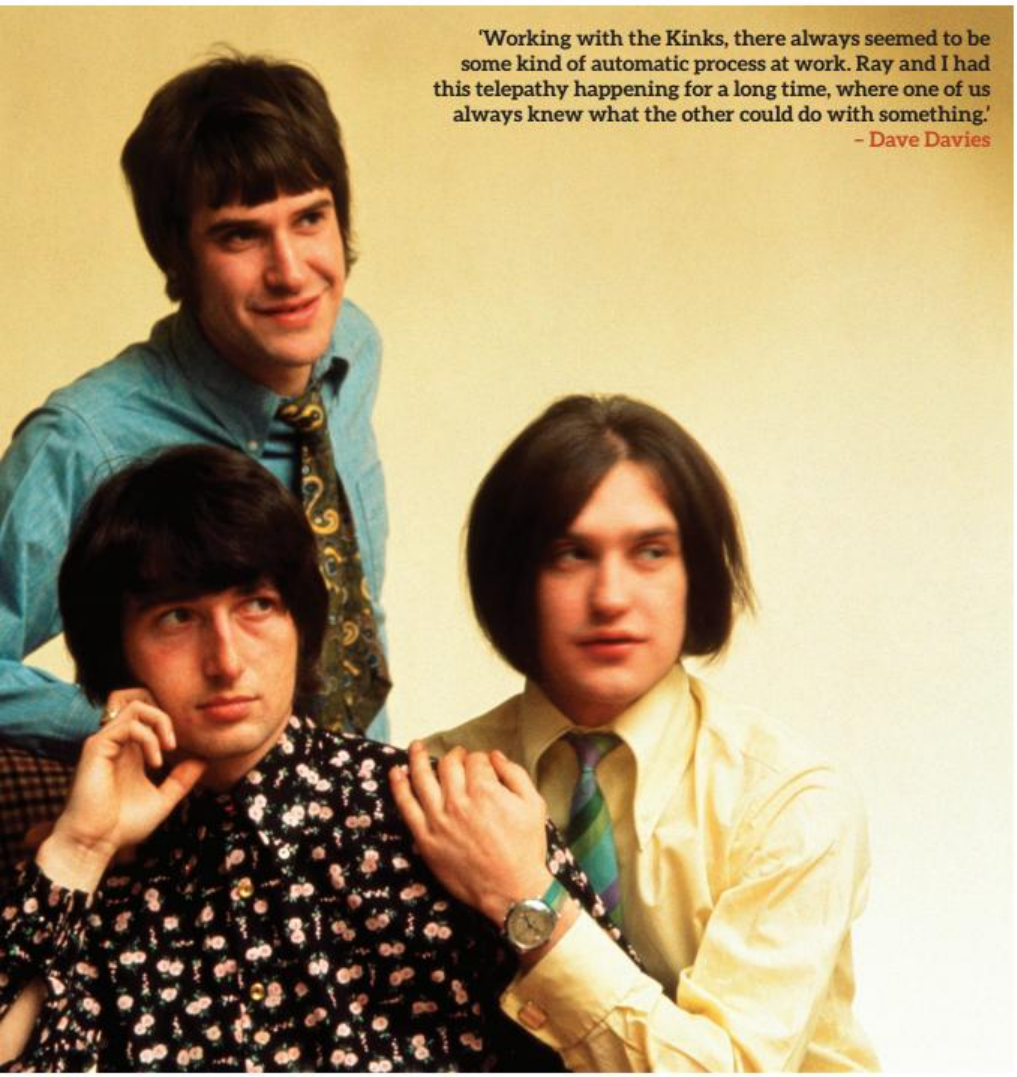
For his part, Ray let go of the reins and allowed the band to make suggestions, which more often than not were realised. 'The basic songs were Ray's,' Dave stated, 'but the music grew out of bouncing off ideas and riffs.'

The result was *The Village Green Preservation Society*, easily the Kinks' most satisfying album, even if Ray later said that it was his most private and personal work and should never have been released.

Pete Quaife had returned to the fold and was temporarily back on bass for one last stand. Now the Kinks gave up on being hip and contemporary and disappeared into a world of their own. The resulting album was one of the best releases of the sixties, and was, it almost goes without saying, their worst-selling record.

*Village Green* sank without trace, failing to chart either at home or in the US.

Although not a concept album in the accepted sense, it possessed what Ray described as an emotional thread,



'Working with the Kinks, there always seemed to be some kind of automatic process at work. Ray and I had this telepathy happening for a long time, where one of us always knew what the other could do with something.'
– Dave Davies

concerning the loss of childhood and the decline of certain innocence in England – with Ray expressing sentiments that seemed to come from a man much older than twenty-four.

The Kinks were so far out of sync with the times that the album had no chance of being a hit. The industry didn't consider them revolutionary enough to be underground and they were too intelligent to be bubblegum, leaving them high and dry. One of the best bands of the age had just released an album of brilliant pop material, but was left with a withered fan base. It is a sad indictment of the inanity and pointlessness of the pop world that an album as brilliant as this was left floundering.

Thankfully the album has always remained on catalogue. People have bought it in a constant stream, and it is now the Kinks' best-selling non-compilation album. Ray pertinently referred to it recently as the 'most successful flop of all time'.

Although *The Village Green Preservation Society* had failed to sell many copies, the Kinks carried on, even if Ray had come to believe that the song *Days* had in truth signaled the end of the band.

The Kinks released their next single, *Plastic Man*, which was pulled by the BBC when it was just starting to climb the charts because it had the word 'bum' in the lyric. Outrageous! Ray later admitted that the single was rushed out in order to promote a tour that the Kinks were about to embark on in 1969. He now claims that he preferred the B-Side, *King Kong*, which is an odd piece of work, an almost neo-glam anthem four years before glam held sway. *King Kong* has a flavour of T. Rex to it and the sort of vocal that Marc Bolan made his own when he was in his pomp.

In late 1968, Ray's obsession with England was allowed to flourish once more when Granada TV approached him with an unusual offer. Would he create a musical drama in conjunction with a writer of his choice? Davies enthusiastically agreed to the offer, putting forward Alan Bennett as his first choice, but eventually settling down to work with novelist Julian Mitchell. The result was a play entitled *Arthur*, or *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire*. By spring 1969, songs and script were ready to go, but then Granada inexplicably lost interest in the project. Undeterred, in October 1969 the Kinks released *Arthur* – Ray's fourth great album in a row.

This was a work whose songs were full of bright musical invention, matched by their clever and sarcastic lyrics and enhanced by great production. Based on the story of his sister who, like many Brits of the time, had moved to Australia, Ray's disillusionment with English life was apparent. The songs tended to fall into two categories: sarcastic war protests (the heart-wrenching *Some Mother's Son* and *Mr. Churchill Says*) or nostalgia pieces that delivered biting social commentary.

Three days after Arthur's release and just before their impending American tour, Pete Quaife finally left the Kinks for good. He claimed that he was fed up with playing 'pretty bubblegum music', and tired of playing simplistic bass lines. There was no enmity in his departure, but there was an air of frustration at being stifled by Ray Davies. Quaife had been the band's spokesman in the early days as Ray had been far too repressed and Dave far too wild, so it had often been left to the bass player's wit and humour to deal with the interviews.

Quaife's departure was the end of an era. It marked the end of the first part of the Kinks' career. If the band had split at this point their reputation would have remained in rock circles as the coolest band of the sixties, with a strong catalogue and their artistic integrity intact. Instead, they brought back John Dalton on bass and finally, on re-entering the States, adapted their sound to breaking the key record market in the world.

# THE BIG QUESTIONS

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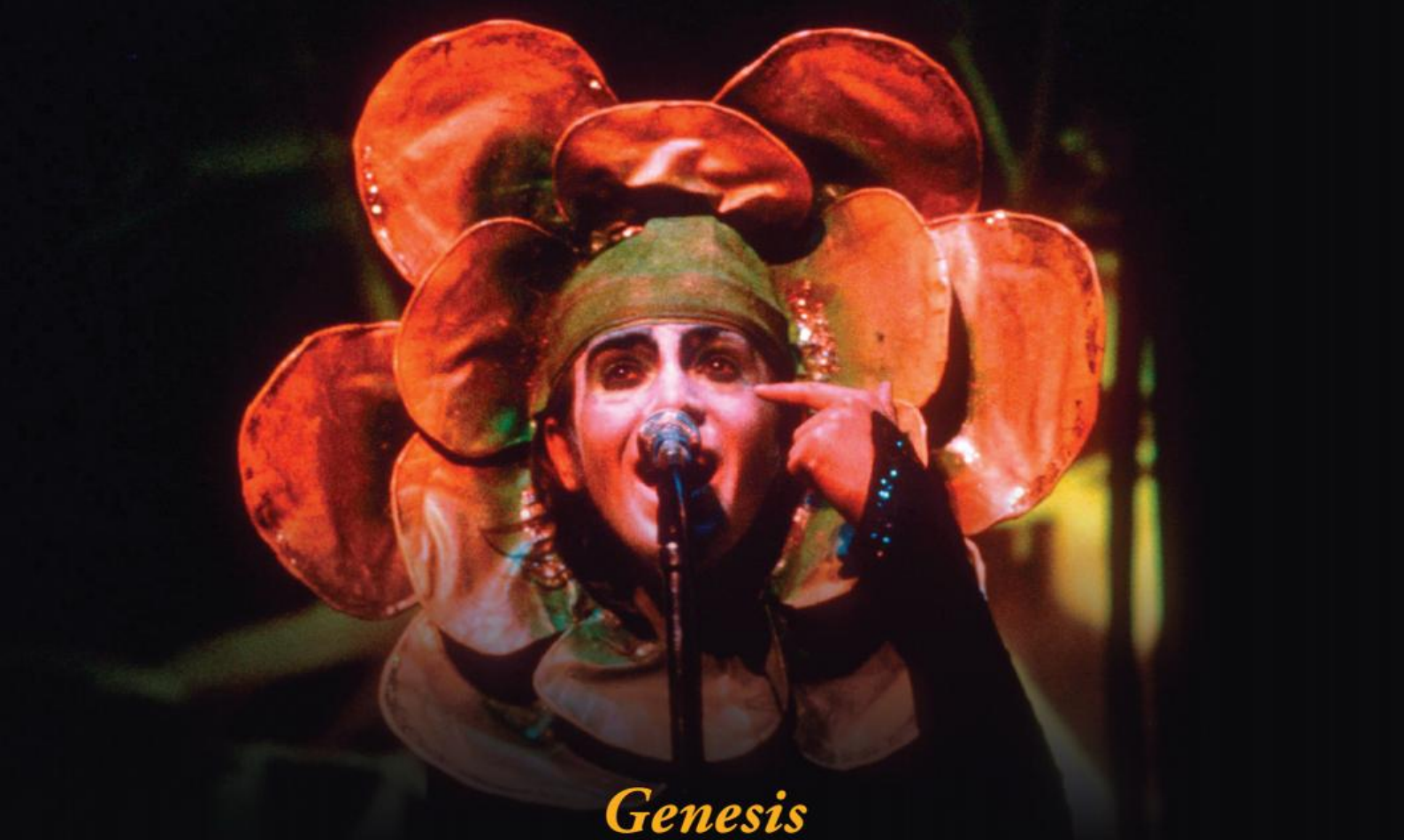
This issue we asked…

## *Who is the greatest prog rock band of all time?*

The results are in; they have been checked, double-checked, triple-checked and verified, and the winner is… *drum roll please…*



## *Genesis*

Formed in 1967 at Charterhouse School, Genesis quickly worked their way into the public eye with their outlandish stage act and unique sound. After years of exhaustive touring Genesis hit it big in the early seventies with albums such as *Foxtrot* and *Selling England by the Pound*. Throughout line-up changes they remained at the forefront of the progressive rock scene for decades and are one of the genres best-loved and most distinctive acts. Whilst for many the name Genesis conjours up images of Peter Gabriel's outlandish onstage looks, the band themselves are best placed to tell us what Genesis was really all about. Here we have interviews with founding members Phil Collins and Tony Banks, as well as longtime guitarist Steve Hackett – this is Genesis in their own words.

Genesis in the early 1970s. Left to right: Mike Rutherford, Steve Hackett, Peter Gabriel, Tony Banks and Phil Collins.

## On Genesis' early years

**Phil Collins:** When I first joined the band I was viewed as class clown because I was a scapegoat in a way, which is fine because a drummer's role is very defined. It's like a goalkeeper; he is there to really present the vibe. You give the band the energy with the playing on the drums and if you give a bit of humour and personality to that vibe then the band will bounce off it.

We started writing songs, and I would write with Tony and Mike. Ant was in another band writing called The Anon, and we would get together for different sessions. I think whenever you start playing music as a teenager you still stand in front of the mirror and still imagine a huge audience, or whatever, all the fantasies are there.

In the early sixties, it was very much that there was only one level of pop music. Then it went up and got more adventurous in a sense, with the Beatles and the Beach Boys and people like that. Then it moved with Pink Floyd and bands of that period, and at a certain point they started to divide into two really. You have the simple stuff, which got simpler in the seventies and then you have the more complicated stuff, which got more complicated. We're obviously in that second strand where we were very much a live based thing, we never got played on the radio really.

We were one of the last bands for instance to come out of the club, college, university circuit. After that singles started becoming very important, whereas with us we actually built up our following throughout many years.

**Tony Banks:** I obviously felt at the time that I had confidence [in Genesis], not in 1968, but I thought in 1970 that the group could definitely get a following. But I always thought we would become a big underground group in England and last a couple of years and that would be it.

On 15 August 1975 it was officially announce that Peter Gabriel was leaving Genesis. Whilst he cited the desire to work on other projects as his main reason for leaving, it was clear that band tensions were a major factor in the decision. His increasingly outlandish stage presence had begun to grate on his fellow bandmates, and creative differences were becoming increasingly apparent. Much of the media at the time speculated that this would be the end of Genesis, but the remaining members rang the changes and began their search for a new lead singer.

## On Peter Gabriel leaving the band

**Steve Hackett:** I mean there was a kind of controlled balance when Peter was a part of the band, because of the fact that you had concrete positions assumed by two separate potential majorities (it sounds like a politician but it really is true). When he left it created an imbalance in terms of the power structure.

The band as such, although they came out with very good things subsequently, wasn't able to break new ground as readily because of the fact that the people that tried to change the music were becoming, shall we say, a dying breed?

Mike Rutherford during a 1973 concert. Rutherford is playing a custom built Rickenbacker double-neck that combined a 12-string semi-hollow-body guitar with a 4-string bass.

**Tony Banks:** In terms of the actual music it never made very much difference. Apart from the fact that he was one fifth of the band and we lost that contribution, but it just changed a bit. That's how it is – sometimes it's difficult for people to see that the one person leaving is not that crucial. But, what it affected in terms of Peter leaving was the audience, who were used to having Peter as a front man or figurehead as you like. When you lose that your image goes with him and you can never ben sure if the audience will follow you once you've lost that side of it. But musically it didn't change; in fact I think musically it improved.

When it came to it, we wanted to do a much more straightforward kind of thing, so that's what it was and I don't really feel it was much different. Obviously you can't really say, but I felt that what we did was a pretty natural thing really.

We did look for another singer, but having decided we weren't going to find one, we definitely decided we were going to try and go with Phil because he seemed keen on the idea. That was the first thing; he was still very much a drummer and presented himself as a drummer more than anything. We just thought that he wouldn't want to not drum, and also weren't sure he could face being up there all the time. I think from an audience point of view it was far easier to accept someone from the ranks of the group, rather than someone who came from the outside. Yet, because of the characters of the two frontmen it was going to be a change.

> "It's definitely the right thing for me to have done, and clearly it was good for them because it filled out the front and gave everyone a bit more space I think."
>
> Peter Gabriel on leaving Genesis

I suppose the people who have left have been the easiest to replace, in a funny way – because we had another singer in the group and we had another guitarist in the group. So in a sense, I would say Peter was the major singer, but Phil did always sing on the albums. And in terms of guitar Mike was doing fifty percent of the guitar anyway; he was doing all of the rhythm guitar parts always. So it was just a question whether he would get the hang of lead.

Steve Hackett left Genesis in 1977 after seven years with the band. Steve has since stated that he felt the band was too slick and popular to allow true creative freedom. He also wanted to pursue his solo career further – a career that was very successful in the following years. To this day Steve continues to tour his own material, as well as classics from his days with Genesis and you can catch him performing two dates in East Sussex in December 2019.

### On Steve Hackett leaving the band

**Tony Banks:** With five people all trying to get ideas in to the group a couple of people are always bound to feel unheard. I think Steve felt very much that he was always being a little bit squeezed out all the time and I think that upset him. It was fair enough, I suppose he was a bit at some times. Although I think the best things he ever did with Genesis were actually on the album *Wind & Wuthering*, which was the last album that he was on with us.

We had been through it with Peter a few years before Steve left. We had always anticipated Steve leaving, I thought he would have left a few years earlier than he did in a way, and for us it wasn't a particularly big thing. In both cases the members were obviously not too happy with being in the group situation, so each time when the person left it was kind of like a freedom. Particularly when we went down to being a three piece, there's something for us about being a three piece that is very natural I think.

**Steve Hackett:** The big thing is that I was told, 'Don't be a naughty boy and just get on with being a part of the group. We don't want you to do a solo album,

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not even in your spare time.' And we had a lot of meetings and arguments, and the whole thing just became so forced and so tedious that there was only one thing I could do. Once you've done one album that you're really pleased with and that has sold well you crave an audience for yourself. There's no way that you're suddenly going to take a step back and assume less responsibility. I've always wanted to work at my full potential and that's hard to do in a band when only a percentage is required.

My real creativity was coming in to play when I wasn't surrounded by other individuals all screaming at once, I find that I need a certain type of tranquility. I don't like to write in rehearsal rooms, to me they are usually too hot, too cold, too dark or too smelly. I sit there and I'm facing three other guys who are at the best colleagues, and at the worst competitors, sitting there knowing that when a group doesn't work it's diluting each one of the individual's ideas. When it does work you have the common denominator.

**Phil Collins:** The five people (as we were when we started) were developing as personalities and expanding as writers and musicians. We need more room and we could barely contain five. Then there were four for a while, and they developed and you could barely contain that. Now there are three of us, and there's a lot more room for each person to breathe and move in. In a group where everyone writes it's a problem, so three is quite a good number.

You never look for change but when it happens it forces us to change, and something new happens. Looking on the bright side of things – that's a good thing, you are forced to reappraise and not get stuck in a certain groove.

Genesis have always had their ups and downs, with tensions within the band and member departures. Yet, through this they have certainly never been short of material. The incredible creative energy that flows from the band has resulted in a proliferation of releases. This sort of legacy can only come from the input of many minds, yet a meeting of visions can often result in power struggles and rivalry in the studio. Fortunately, for the most part, Genesis seem to have been able to put these issues aside and have worked cohesively on a staggering volume of work over the years.

Peter Gabriel as 'Old Man Henry'.
'Music is a spiritual doorway. Its power comes from the fact that it plugs directly into the soul.'
– Peter Gabriel

## On Genesis' creative process

**Steve Hackett:** I was very influenced by the others, because to a large extent I am a fan of each of them in their own particular way. Certain things that each of them do have impressed me and it's really rare to find that in a band (where you're that into the other musicians).

I can't play over everything; I see spaces where I think the guitar belongs and I put it in there. That's probably why people wish I played more, but I can only play where it seems to be right to play. If I don't think it seems right to play then I don't.

Sometimes it feels like you've run out of sounds rather than notes, and a way to discipline yourself against that is to have what I have, which is a Nylon guitar. I play that as much as possible at home, and I write a lot of things on that trying to see how much is available within one tonal range, it's a completely acoustic sound.

**Phil Collins:** Usually we all come in with an idea separately. Someone comes in with an idea and we expand on it. We do the words, the arrangement and the music all democratically, so everyone does their own bits.

It's certainly a subtle [balance in the studio]. No one really says that much about it. There's a lot of energy for this song, or this bit, and not so much energy for this song, so that gets phased out. Then as time goes on you find you're whittling it down to roughly album length.

We work on everything that we collectively enjoy I suppose. Then one or two things will fall by the wayside as you go along. Sometimes there's a sneaking feeling that something isn't going to make it and you work on them anyhow to see how it happens. Sometimes those things do develop in to good numbers.

My role is definitely as a writer, I'm not a very natural performer but in a group nowadays you have to contain all

Genesis in performance in 1974. Peter Gabriel performs as 'Britannia' alongside Mike Rutherford.

'People have the strength to overcome their bodies. Their beauty is in their minds.' – Peter Gabriel

the different aspects within the group. In the old days, I suppose there used to be writers who never performed and performers who never wrote.

Basically the band is made up of composers, and if a song feels good at three minutes long then we'll leave it at three minutes. There are some things you can't stretch out for the sake of it, because they just feel right at that length and therefore you will leave it at this length. Take *Follow You Follow Me*, if you ask our ardent fans what they think of it, they will say it was a group single and a commercial single. But, to me it was one of the hippest things we had ever done. The way it was written was because it was out of improvisation really. There was a jam that just honed itself in to this verse, chorus, verse, chorus, and the attitude behind it was totally on the level. Yet, to the punters I suppose they see it as their band trying to get a hit single, but we never really needed that – in America you need that.

We've always been unaffected by trends and fashions in music really, and we've always made the music we wanted to make.

**Tony Banks:** What was important about Genesis was always the song; we tend to feel we were more like an experimental pop band. OK, we tended to go a little further down a certain direction, although we didn't really think we were like anybody. We were more our own sort of thing.

The songs evolved in the studio very much. When we know the form of the song we tend to just go in the studio and put it down with the rhythm machine. Most of the time now we just put it down roughly. I'll play something, Mike will play something, Phil will sing actually a little bit, just go 'la la' or something. Even if it's not the right vocal it gives you the idea of where the vocal will be. Then we'll take it and what we'll do is we'll start again with the rhythm machine, and we'll probably start by putting on the drums, then maybe a real basic keyboard and basic guitar. We build the song up slowly like that.

I was a pianist, and then I got hold of a Hammond organ. The Hammond organ is a great instrument, there's a lot you can do with it. With every instrument I had, I used to find out all its facets and the Hammond especially you could draw big bar sounds or fuzzbox sounds. You could just use the percussion part, or just the organ on and off, anything you could do to it you did it. So I think in those early days you had just as much range within where you were. Now if I went back to just using a Hammond I would find it a bit restrictive, but at the time it gave you a whole big area of things to do.

We tend to use the instruments more for character than soloing, but that has never been a very big feature in Genesis. We do what you might call solos but we look at them more as instrumentals. Just like your vocal if you like using the

Peter Gabriel in concert with Genesis in 1974.
'I don't want to project myself above the band. I just poodle about and put on silly costumes.' – Peter Gabriel

instrumental line, because it sounds better played than sung. I have always used echoes on the choruses on the keyboards; I think they're crucial. I think all synthesized sounds in general need something to give them a bit of spark because they're very one-dimensional things. You need to do something to give them a bit of space.

The Genesis sound is something very much that is still the same, so we like to contrast with that.

Peter Gabriel's bizarre costumes quickly became synonymous with the name Genesis. Concertgoers had never seen anything like it, and Gabriel's entrance onstage was often met by a stunned silence. Whilst the striking visuals initially helped gain publicity for the band, many members felt that they came to overshadow the creative output of Genesis as a whole. His most famous outfits included a black batwing headdress/leotard combination, a low cut red dress (borrowed from his wife) topped by a giant fox head, the famous flower hat and of course the startling, boil-covered vision that was 'Slipperman'.

## On Genesis' unique visual imagery

**Phil Collins:** With *Watcher of the Skies* there was the bat wings and the UV makeup. We were holding UV tubes, and there were things that at that time hadn't really been seen in a rock context, so there was a certain shock value.

There was the Slipperman – who was supposed to be nastily contorted for all sorts of reasons. He had great sorts of growths all over him, and it looked great, but the music was starting to become secondary. I think we realised we had gone too far at that point.

The Slipperman was, in some respects, the last straw, the visual last straw.

It is not just onstage that Genesis shine. In the studio they have traversed the far reaches of progressive rock. They are capable of creating otherworldly soundscapes, yet also of vividly invoking an image so familiar the listener feels they are really there. With some truly wild sonic experimentation under their belt, there is a litany of methods and techniques that have been used over the years to produce Genesis' unique sound.

## On Genesis' studio techniques

**Tony Banks:** We make use of a lot of cheap compressors when using Phil's voice; that's how you get the edge on his voice. What they did was very crude – they had no nice curve, they would hear the sound and let the first part escape, then there would be a massive cut off. If you listen to the songs you will hear that, that gives the character of it and the way the vocals are almost spat out.

We just tended to find we used weird time signatures like on *Back In N.Y.C.*. They weren't consciously weird, or we never intended them to be. It just tended to be how they ended up; we just tended to make it sound that way when we were writing or something. It just sounded very natural.

**Steve Hackett:** I often go for a lot of undistorted tones, which most guitarists won't use. Most electric guitarists will turn their amplifier fully up, and they want that distortion on just about everything they do, but we often rely on fuzzbox to do that.

I got a pedalboard that runs off mains instead of batteries, and I got an octave divider built in, which gives you a lower

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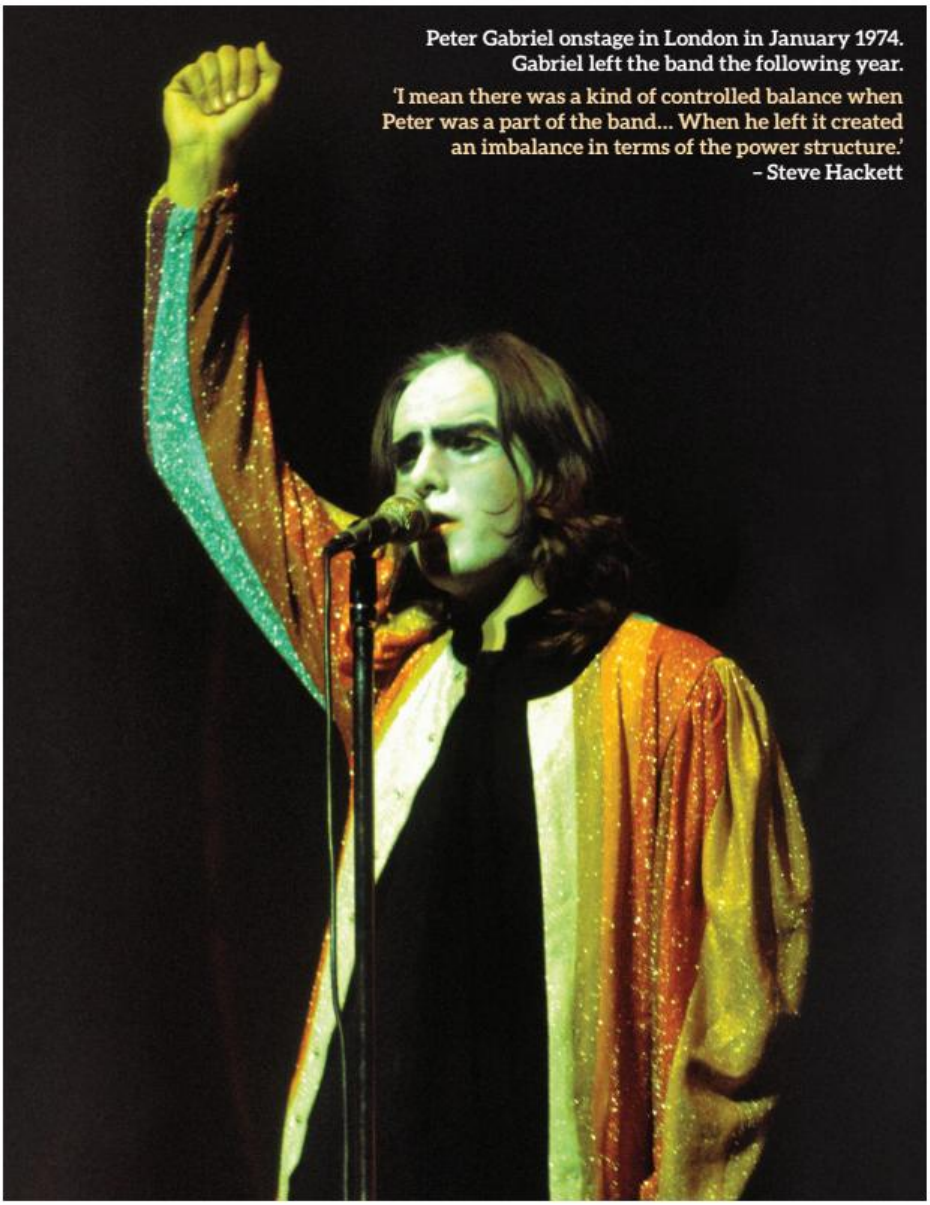


Peter Gabriel onstage in London in January 1974. Gabriel left the band the following year.

'I mean there was a kind of controlled balance when Peter was a part of the band... When he left it created an imbalance in terms of the power structure.' – Steve Hackett

octave. I have a wah-wah pedal, cry baby, Marshall Supa Fuzz, Shaftesbury Duo Fuzz, an MXR Phase 90 shallow volume pedal and an Echoplex Hi-Fli.

In *The Battle of Epping Forest*, the marching soldiers at the beginning were done with the guitar. That's the guitar through a fuzzbox with an octave divider. So you have the distortion from the fuzzbox and the intermodulation between the strings when you weren't holding down notes. Then you take it down an octave, so it was like boots crunching on gravel or marching. Then it had a close echo on it so that doubled it, so out of time marching. The idea was that it would pan in the cans from side to side; if you listen to it on cans in fact it does. As it comes closer it's like a line of soldiers coming towards you.

I have a guitar synthesizer called the Hi-Fli and it's excellent for little jokey sounds. I used it for the song *Counting Out Time* on the new album, and people wondered what it was, if it was a synthesizer or a voice, or a kazoo. I said, 'No, it was a guitar solo!' The ticking sound that I got I patched up. There was a thing where you would hear the note, then it would raise the actual pitch of the note and raise it above and then below so it would be like a vibrato.

As a young band Genesis spent years building up an underground following, touring clubs and universities. They honed their craft using a highly experimental approach, and it was this experience that made them one of the most exciting and unpredictable live acts around. Over the years their performance toned down the weird factor but lost none of the skill and cohesion of the band's early sets.

## On Genesis live

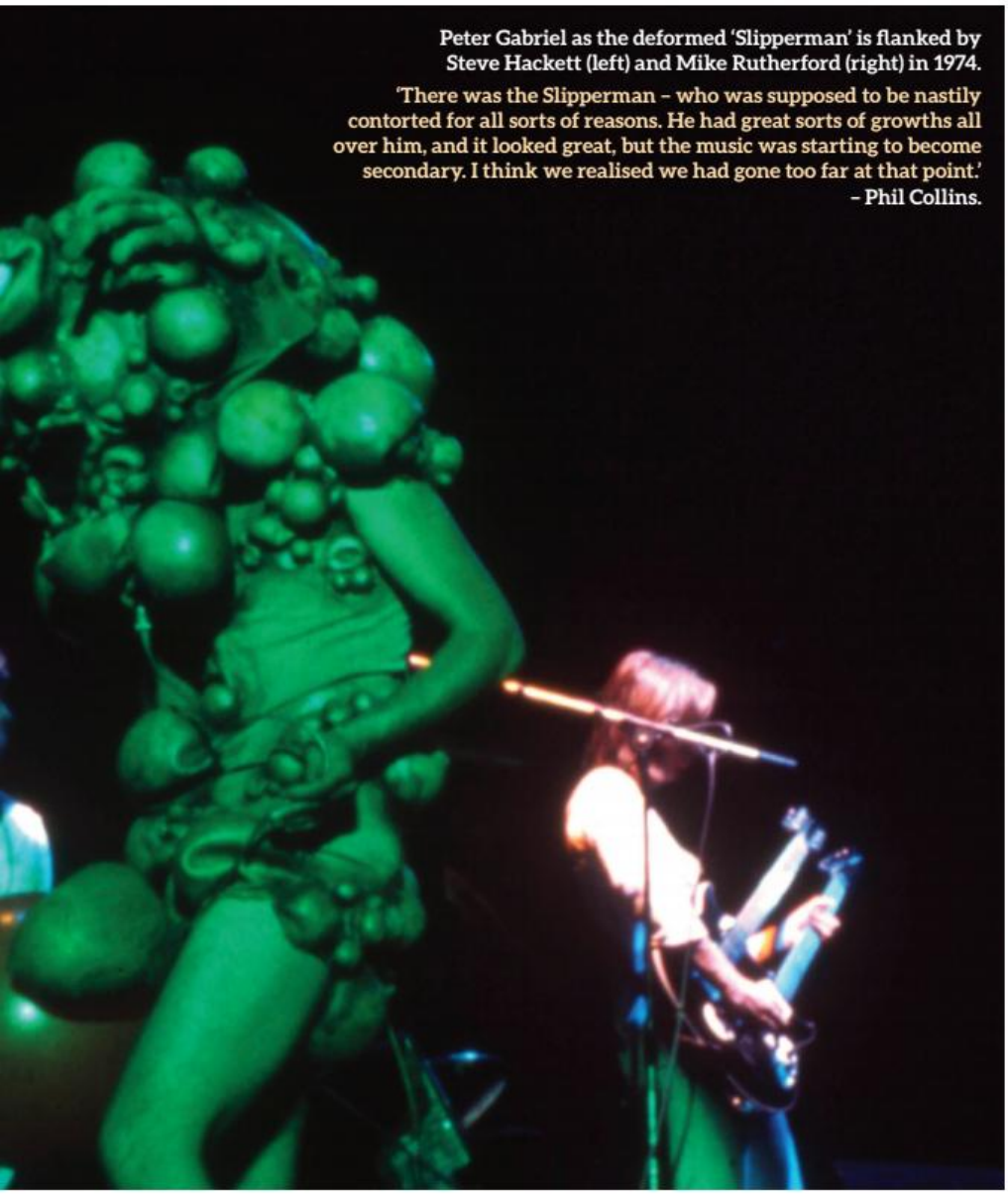
**Phil Collins:** You can sometimes tell a good musician from the way they sit down at their instrument before they have played a note.

Each gig is basically very different, you're still dealing with a different set of people and what they give back to you makes you give one hundred percent. I find it very hard to do anything less or better than I did the night before anyway. It's like an ongoing thing; you're just trying to do it a bit better every time. You have to think of the set in the same way, dare I say it that you would titillate a woman; you have to reach some kind of climax hopefully.

We like audiences that sit down and listen to the music rather than get drunk and pick up girls – big ones. We like audiences that sit down and listen to us.

We still enjoy playing together so that is one of the reasons that we're staying together.

**Steve Hackett:** I don't think that in comparison to the live performance that the band gave, that the recorded works



Peter Gabriel as the deformed 'Slipperman' is flanked by Steve Hackett (left) and Mike Rutherford (right) in 1974.

'There was the Slipperman – who was supposed to be nastily contorted for all sorts of reasons. He had great sorts of growths all over him, and it looked great, but the music was starting to become secondary. I think we realised we had gone too far at that point.' – Phil Collins.

ever came anywhere near it. I think the albums should have been looked at far more carefully and critically and perhaps the album sales would have reflected that.

A prolific outfit if there ever was one, Genesis' back catalogue contains more than twenty albums – fifteen of those studio albums. When you add in the many box sets and over forty singles Genesis have released, you are left with a staggering body of work that spans decades. With the outpouring of creative energy coming from the band it is interesting to see how they look back on their own discography.

## On Genesis' catalogue

**Tony Banks:** What we did with *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* was something that the whole band wanted to do and it was a very ambitious project. It was a double album concept, sort of thing, and it gave us the freedom to do more within that. There were more improvised passages and mood pieces without any vocals or anything. That was very much a part of what we wanted to do.

And *Then There Were Three* included a lot of songs that I wrote on my own. It was pretty much a solo album half by Mike and half by myself really. There were a couple of group songs but it really came from Mike and I. Then Mike and I both put out solo albums just after that and they did nothing.

In commercial terms, *And Then There Were Three* was probably the biggest quantum leap we had between two albums. Between that and *Wind & Wuthering* was probably the biggest difference of all the albums. There was obviously the presence of the single *Follow You Follow Me* on it, which did do something a lot of places.

The way the albums have gone, in America each album has sold more than its predecessor but in Europe there have been more ups and downs.

**Steve Hackett:** For me, the most creative album that the band did was *Selling England by the Pound*. I think that showcased both the song aspect that the band had and some of the playing talent, you know? Occasionally the instruments were allowed to breathe unaccompanied, not very often but occasionally. I think the odd solo was on there. On *Cinema Show*, I think the keyboard solo that went on interminably in one chord was too damn long. But apart from that I think it showcased the individual abilities pretty nicely.

With everything left to the last minute [on *Selling England by the Pound*] I found that the finalization of my part was basically impossible. I was continually changing it until we recorded and there was a lot more that was improvised because of that.

Personally, if I look back to the last two albums with the band, I wouldn't necessarily say that the selection of material that went on them was entirely in accordance with my own views – as to what was outstanding and what wasn't.

These extracts are taken from interviews featured in our exclusive documentary *Genesis – In Their Own Words*. To view this show and many more simply scan the QR code at the bottom of the page, or visit our channel at **mlmag.uk/youtube** and subscribe today to never miss an episode.

# BOB DYLAN

## The Road to Blood on the Tracks

Singer-songwriter, poet, artist, and Nobel Prize winner – it would be hard to find anyone today who doesn't know the name Bob Dylan. One of the best-admired artists of all time, his influence has reached past music and deep in to our daily culture. Unfortunately things weren't always smooth sailing for the visionary and here we look at the tumultuous period in his life between 1966–1974.

**On the morning of 29 July 1966 Bob Dylan jumped onto his British built Triumph Bonneville 650 motorcycle and rode off through the deserted roads that ran through the woods around his Woodstock home. He hadn't slept for three days and the punishing lifestyle of the preceding years had begun to take its toll. He was pencil thin, and photographs of him immediately prior to this particular morning show a haunted, distant and gaunt figure. Cresting the brow of a hill Dylan was blinded by the sun, causing him to panic and hit his brakes. He lost control of the back wheel and came off. Injured, Dylan lay by the side of the road with a cracked vertebrae and bad concussion. Sara (his new wife of seven months and mother to his baby son Jesse) was following safely behind in a car.**

That same evening the Beatles took the stage in Candlestick Park San Francisco for their last ever organised live appearance. Meanwhile, Dylan was in hospital, where he remained for a week. The accident happened only two months after his final controversial appearance at London's Royal Albert Hall – a gig that ended a tour during which the previously idolising audience had booed a visibly shaken Dylan. He had famously lost his stage cool in Manchester, shouting back at the catcalls, and responding to slow hand claps by telling the band to 'Play fucking loud!'

> 'I consider myself a poet first and a musician second. I live like a poet and I'll die like a poet.'
>
> **BOB DYLAN**

The controversy had started a year before in July 1965 at the Newport Folk Festival, when the newly electrified Bob had plugged in and turned away a large part of his folk based following. Whether the audience was booing Dylan's electric set or the person responsible for unplugging him after only fifteen minutes is unknown. It was Dylan, of course, who had the last word when he returned to the stage with an acoustic guitar, and played the woefully appropriate number *It's All Over Now, Baby Blue.*

It certainly was all over, and it was fifteen minutes that changed the music world forever. Once again Dylan had led the way, and in so doing had surrounded himself in a fog of controversy. A controversy that followed him into Europe and saw him booed in Paris, Sheffield, the Albert Hall, and perhaps most famously, in Manchester. At the Manchester Free Trade Hall on 17 May 1966, Keith Butler heckled Dylan with a call of 'Judas', during a lull in the set.

Dylan fired back, 'I don't believe you, you're a liar', before launching into a lively *Like a Rolling Stone*. As moments

in music history go, this one vitriolic insult hurled at the figurehead of a musical generation stands right up there with the Stones infamous Altamont gig in signifying the end of an era. This moment was heavily bootlegged under the incorrect assumption that it had been recorded at the Albert Hall in the capital, before it was finally confirmed that it had been the Manchester concert.

In that one moment an upset and hurt young fan had confirmed to the world that the times had indeed changed. Even the most animated of critics of this tour would have to agree that the passing of time has proved that Dylan had once again stepped over the parapet for others to follow. The tour took its toll, and after the storm of interviews during which he was constantly being asked to explain or justify his move away from folk. The folk tradition had embraced him completely since his almost messianic arrival in the early sixties and was seen as integral to Dylan as an artist. An emotionally exhausted Dylan desperately sought some peace and quiet from the bombardment, and returned to Woodstock to spend time with wife Sara and son Jesse.

By the time of his fateful crash Bob Dylan had produced several of the most iconoclastic albums of an era. The 1962 self titled *Bob Dylan* album captured a fresh faced and very young Dylan displaying his full repertoire of Woody Guthrie influences, and included an original Dylan track that was a tribute *Song for Woody*.

In 1963 *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* album acted as a lighthouse to an emerging songwriting talent that few could ignore. This was an artist with not only something to say but something worth saying. Dylan's fast emerging genius allowed him to fully communicate these protests and worldly observations to an eager and enthusiastic generation. A generation that felt that this was the poet that would lead the way for them. His legendary tracks included *Girl from the North Country*, *A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall* (a track that connected to a world living in fear of an apocalyptic end during the Cuban missile crisis), *Don't Think Twice It's Alright*, *Masters of War* and the masterful *Blowin' in the Wind*. This last song was written in New York, and would become a flag to the youth of America.

His reputation was further underlined by some of the bravest and most confrontational lyrics to date in anti-racism songs such as *Oxford Town*, and the anti-war *Talkin' World War III Blues*. These tracks echoed the concerns filtering through all walks of American life. As a result, Dylan's profile was already significant enough to follow the Reverend Martin Luther King onto the Lincoln Memorial steps on 28 August 1963. At this momentous event he underlined the legendary *I Have a Dream* speech by performing *Blowin' in the Wind* and *Only a Pawn in Their Game* in front of more than two hundred thousand protestors.

Bob Dylan recording his debut studio album in November 1961. Released on 19 March 1962 by Columbia Records, the album was produced by Columbia's legendary talent scout John H. Hammond.

In 1964, *The Times They Are a-Changin'* saw Dylan at his peak as a contemporary protest songwriter. He inspired and confronted the American nation with finger pointing songs such as *Only a Pawn in Their Game* and *The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll*. These were in addition to the famous title track; a song that captured the feeling in the air that through music the world could change. The political turmoil of this period was tragically illustrated when, within one month of the album's release, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

*Another Side of Bob Dylan* quickly followed, and it was reported that eleven of the tracks were recorded in one amazingly productive session. This gave birth to Bob Dylan's subsequent recording style, illustrating his desire to make albums sound real and live rather than over-produced. It was a technique that would challenge many of the musicians that have supported Dylan throughout his career. The album included *My Back Pages*, *Spanish Harlem Incident*, *All I Really Want to Do* and *Chimes of Freedom*. This was the start of a period of such productivity for Dylan that he was able to hand songs out to fellow musicians such as the Byrds, who

famously covered *Mr. Tambourine Man*, and whose guitarist Roger McGuinn would later feature on the *Rolling Thunder Revue* tour.

A trilogy of career defining albums followed with *Bringing It All Back Home* and *Highway 61 Revisited*, which were released in 1965, and 1966's magnificent *Blonde on Blonde*. *Bringing It All Back Home* contained *It's All Over Now Baby Blue*, *It's Alright Ma* and *Gates of Eden* on an acoustic side. Before *Subterranean Homesick Blues* and *Maggies' Farm* gave a hint of what was to come on the electric side that also included *Love Minus Zero/ No Limit*.

*Highway 61 Revisited* took the theme several steps further and opened with the masterpiece *Like a Rolling Stone*. This was followed by *Tombstone Blues* and included the poetic *Desolation Row*. It was a landmark of the musical revolution that Dylan was inspiring, and even today the album still challenges. There is a tangible anxiousness to his sound on this album that reflects the circus that surrounded him. This gave a feeling of urgency and amphetamine driven edginess; Dylan had a lot to say and seemingly couldn't write it quickly enough.

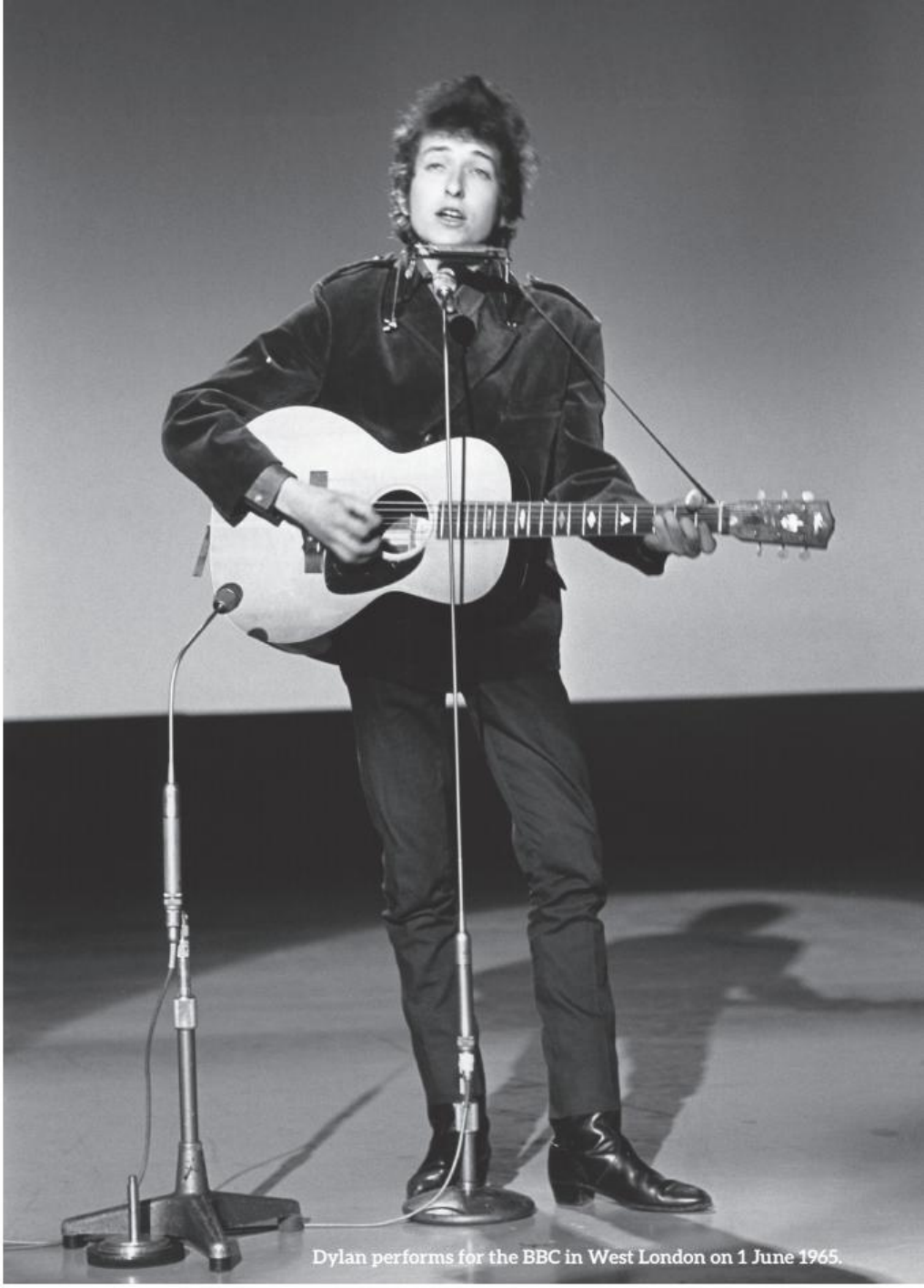
Many were concerned that Dylan would be unable to follow up such an excellent release, but he went to Nashville, Tennessee and recorded the magnificent *Blonde on Blonde*. *Blonde on Blonde* is often cited as one of the greatest albums of all time, and many argue it is Dylan's *Sgt. Pepper* or *Pet Sounds*. The album included classic tracks such as *Rainy Day Women #12 & 35*, *I Want You*, *Just Like a Woman* and *Visions of Johanna*. *Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands* brought the album to a close and shortly after recording the track Dylan stated, 'This is the best song I've ever written.' In 1975 Dylan wrote *Sara* – a paean to his wife, in which he claimed to have been 'stayin' up for days in the Chelsea Hotel, writin' *Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands* for you'. It is quite simply a classic recording and ended a prolific period for Dylan, in which he wrote the best material of his career.

The electrified furore of 1966 shook the folk world to its very foundations. By the time Dylan came off his motorbike on that sunny morning in July 1966, the relentless demands and pressure had driven him to the point of nervous exhaustion. The voice of a generation lay in a hospital bed as rumours circulated of him being disfigured or even dead.

In truth it appears that people simply could not get used to a world where Bob Dylan was suddenly silent, and his mysterious disappearance left a huge gap that desperately needed to be filled. Being Bob Dylan meant that when he did finally appear it was a memorable and wholly unexpected experience. The roots of the *Rolling Thunder Revue* tour were well and truly planted on that potentially fatal day. Dylan emerged changed by the experience, stating that he saw not only his past but also his future fly before him. That future included the much-underrated 1968 country classic *John Wesley Harding*, a sprawling soundtrack of an album. The past included *Tarantula*, a speed-inspired written work he could no longer relate to, evidence of the change in his post-accident state of mind.

As Dylan retreated to his home in Woodstock, the nation moved towards an event at that very location that would come to represent the whole *Times They Are a-Changin'* movement. Seemingly, even in his absence Dylan could inspire a whole generation. Whatever the extent of his injuries, it seemed they gave him exactly the space he clearly needed. It quite possibly saved Dylan's life, as it is clear that he could not sustain a life of staying up day after day without sleep, surviving on pills.

Dylan then worked on the film of the eventful 1966 tour that ended just before the crash, peering at images of a Dylan that he no longer knew. He busied himself by reading through the *Tarantula* material and working on the biographical film *Eat the Document*, which opens with him snorting an unknown substance in a Paris hotel. But in the main he stayed out of the spotlight. Ironically his absence left him sought after to such an extent that it bordered on obsession.



Dylan performs for the BBC in West London on 1 June 1965.

**Bob Dylan in London in May 1966.**
**'Behind every beautiful thing, there's some kind of pain.' – Bob Dylan**

During the summer of 1967, a period that is known as the Summer of Love, Dylan was strangely absent. Instead he was reassessing his life and part of that reassessment seemingly involved settling a couple of accounts. He reworked *All American Boy* into his own retaliation against manager Albert Grossman. The song wouldn't be heard publicly for another twenty-five years. More significantly Dylan began to record again. Also living in Woodstock at that time in the legendary house known as The Big Pink or 2188 Stoll Road, West Saugerties, was three fifths of The Band.

The Band, or the Hawks as they had been known, consisted of Levon Helm, Garth Hudson, Robbie Robertson, Rick Danko and Richard Manuel. This incredible array of talent gathered in the house to start impromptu work on sessions that would finally, after many years of bootlegging, be officially released in the mid seventies during the time of the *Rolling Thunder Revue*. The Band's influence on music at that time cannot be understated, and the excellent double release *The Basement Tapes* perfectly showcased the personnel on display.

Although it was not revealed to the public, *The Basement Tapes* featured a new Dylan with a new direction that saw him exploring the old whilst most importantly recording again. It is very much a partnership between Dylan and a band of incredible talent that meshed together to produce an absolute gem of an album. Each member explores the roots of American music at a time when the world's eyes were on the West Coast of the country. There was even room for Dylan to provide one of his most emotionally charged offerings with *Tears of Rage*, a track that seems to illustrate why he was keeping a lower profile.

Once the sessions finished The Band broke away to make one of the most important musical documents of the era – *Music from Big Pink*. Dylan meanwhile conjured up a gospel soaked country classic in *John Wesley Harding*. This classic album contained such gems as *All Along the Watchtower*, *I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine* and *I Pity the Poor Immigrant*. All of which would feature strongly in the *Rolling Thunder Revue* tour several years later. Both of these albums, whose seeds were sown in the basement of The Big Pink earlier that year, have been cited by many musicians of the time as being of the utmost cultural importance.

*John Wesley Harding* introduced a calmer, less wired Dylan as he explored music away from the modern world that had caused him so much anxiety and pain. It also opened the door to his exploration of the spiritual with scripture based references and gospel tinged sounds. It was a journey that ultimately led him on yet another trip into controversy several years later.

April 1969 saw Dylan return to the studio and emerge with *Nashville Skyline*, an album that received mixed reviews. Perhaps this was inevitable as it opens

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Dylan in 1967.

'A man is a success if he gets up in the morning and gets to bed at night, and in between he does what he wants to do.'
– Bob Dylan

with a duet of Dylan and fellow legend Johnny Cash singing *Girl from the North Country*. The song hardly compliments either of their reputations, and the continued country and western sound doesn't help. Dylan's disappointed fans reflected on the fact that where *John Wesley Harding* had been atmospheric and almost mystical in places, this album was altogether more lightweight. Despite that criticism, Dylan himself was reported as saying it was his most satisfactory release to date. On 1 May 1969 Dylan was invited to appear on *The Johnny Cash Show* and performed powerful and confident versions of *I Threw It All Away* and *Living the Blues*.

In August 1969 Albert Grossman ceased acting as Dylan's manager. This departure may explain some of Dylan's reluctance to release *The Basement Tapes* recordings officially, as Grossman would have profited by them. Dylan now seemed happy in the apparent domestic bliss that he had carved out for himself in Woodstock – a picture that he had unquestionably illustrated on *Nashville Skyline*. On this album he questioned his pre-crash life with songs such as *Tonight I'll Be Staying Here with You* and the intensely reflective *I Threw It All Away*. It is an album that, despite being commercially disappointing on release has fared well in retrospect – after all it contains one of Dylan's best-known hits *Lay Lady Lay*.

As the world descended on Max Yasgur's farm for the weekend of 15–17 August 1969, Dylan left for the United Kingdom. The location of the Woodstock Festival was no coincidence, but Dylan didn't answer the call and instead agreed to perform on 31 August at the Isle of Wight Festival instead. The promoters of the festival had relentlessly pursued Dylan to headline the second gathering and it took six months to prize him out of Woodstock to do just that. The first festival on the small island off the South Coast of England had taken place the previous year at Godshill and the San Francisco band Jefferson Airplane had headlined the bill that also included a very new T. Rex. Writing this many years later it seems strange indeed that Dylan agreed to appear on a small island across the globe, whilst the world watched the biggest festival in the world achieve legendary status in his own back yard.

The venue was switched to Wootton for the arrival of Bob Dylan and The Band, The Who (who had also appeared at Woodstock and would re-appear at the Isle of Wight Festival the following year), Free, the Moody Blues and Joe Cocker. Tickets were eagerly snapped up at £3 each. The festival peaked the following year when The Who, the Doors and Jimi Hendrix appeared in front of a crowd of over half a million people. In 1969 a medical post was set up for people not enjoying the powerful effects of LSD, and a whole community of temporary tents sprang up like a village that became known as 'Desolation Row'.

Bob Dylan stayed at the Forelands Farm, Bembridge and was soon visited by John and Yoko Lennon, George and Patti Harrison, and Ringo and Maureen Starr. The set list was, as ever, anything but finalised right up until the last moment; lists handed to The Band had question marks next to several numbers. The white-suited Dylan and The Band took the stage to a rapturous welcome. What happened next is open to interpretation. To some it was an all too brief moment in the presence of genius – to others it was the personification of disappointment.

Among the crowd was most of the Beatles, the Stones, Elton John, Jane Fonda with her husband Roger Vadim and Syd Barrett's Pink Floyd. They had all been drawn to see an icon. Dylan opened with *She Belongs to Me* and worked through a set that also included *Maggie's Farm*, *Lay Lady Lay*, *Mighty Quinn*, *Mr. Tambourine Man* and *Like a Rolling Stone*. The crowd's reaction to the last two songs was nothing short of electric. However, only fifty minutes had passed when Dylan left the stage. He briefly returned to perform an encore,

but his early departure was a huge disappointment for the massive crowd. Needless to say the short set was heavily criticised by people who really should have known better, remembering that this was his first major appearance for some time. On leaving the island the next day Dylan called in briefly to run through the track *Cold Turkey* with John Lennon before flying back to the States.

Sadly Dylan's attempt to return to the stage had ended in near disarray. Firstly he cancelled the intended release of the Isle of Wight performance. This resulted in a bonanza for bootleggers. Despite various attempts at remixing his set he did not want to be reminded of it, and withdrew back to Woodstock. The album remained unreleased, and all previous talk and plans of a tour were shelved.

Tired of the constant gate-crashers, voyeurs and of the artistic drought that he was experiencing in Woodstock he decided to move back to Manhattan. Quite how he felt he would escape attention in the fishbowl of 'the Village' is not quite clear but, once decided, his wish to return to the scene he had known before the crash took shape. In January 1970, he bought a town house along MacDougal Street, feeling the need for the vibrancy of city life.

Very quickly he became the victim of some quite disturbing incidents involving intrusive fans, and instead of being able to get out into the scene of the clubs, he was far too often trapped within the house. In an almost deliberate attempt to shatter some of the mania, worship and analytical dissection surrounding his output he went to work on one of his most controversial albums.

*Self Portrait* can be seen as the artist almost parodying himself and in covering some unexpected material he was perhaps trying to push back some of the intense and unwanted scrutiny. Either way it is, by most standards, a mystifying album. In some respects it could quite possibly have damaged many a career. When it arrived it came in a cover depicting one of his own paintings that helped give the album its name. What he was trying to say by both the material and the cover is only really known to Dylan himself.

In retrospect it would appear that it was almost a self-destructive act to deflect some of the much unwanted attention he was always receiving. The release's arrival was tantamount to a musical meltdown. A compilation of dubious covers and lower case Dylan originals resulted in an album that had the critics positively salivating at the prospect of slaughtering him. Of course it was a job they gladly did. For example Greil Marcus of *Rolling Stone* famously opened his review with the line, 'What is this shit?' Most wondered why the 'voice of a generation' would want to cover other people's songs in the first place, and why some of the material on there at all.

**Dylan in 1969.**
**'I accept chaos, I'm not sure whether it accepts me.'**
**– Bob Dylan**

Fortunately there are redeeming moments and the cover of *Copper Kettle* captures Dylan at his unmistakable best. Years later, many assert that though the album is tarnished by the stinging criticism, it still produces some flashes of his brilliance. Evidently the media simply could not reconcile the fact that the Dylan, who had previously embodied New York, had changed almost beyond recognition. If they had looked a little deeper they would have seen that hidden within the album were several originals from sessions recorded in March 1970. *It Hurts Me Too* and *Alberta* (both versions) each indicated that he had once again found inspiration.

Stung and hurt by the vitriolic response to *Self Portrait*, Dylan dipped into the studio once again and came out with *New Morning*. The sessions were conducted in New York just as *Self Portrait* hit the racks, and it was released a mere four months later. *New Morning* once again projects a warmth of contented domesticity, as Dylan reflects on being a father whilst trying to escape the craziness that had nearly destroyed his life. In complete contrast to *Self Portrait*, *New Morning* was full of original material. The album starts with *If Not for You*, a song famously covered

**Bob Dylan performs during the Isle of Wight Festival on 31 August 1969. The festival attracted an audience of approximately 150,000.**

by his good friend George Harrison on the triple album *All Things Must Pass*. The introspective *Sign on the Window* is a truly standout track and would have been so in any Dylan set.

Although still a little weak by his own standards, *New Morning* was heralded as a return to form. The album ends with a strong indication of where Dylan's thoughts were heading with the inspirational *Father of Night*. The relatively warm reception that *New Morning* had enjoyed almost prompted Dylan to go back on stage, and he even commenced rehearsals with Al Kooper and Harvey Brooks amongst others. Sadly the intended live dates did not materialise. In another significant development Dylan parted company with Albert Grossman, finally ending their partnership on 17 July 1970. Meanwhile the book *Tarantula*, dating from before the crash finally started to appear in bootleg form, becoming an underground cult item. 1971–1972 saw Dylan entering his quietest period to date. It was an era that did not produce any new albums and rumours of his writing block continued unabated.

During this period, on 1 August 1971, Dylan responded to a call from George Harrison and made a charity appearance in The Concert for Bangladesh. Harrison ended a beautiful version of *Here Comes the Sun* from The Beatles' *Abbey Road* album, and looked hopefully over to see if Dylan was actually going to come on to the stage or not. Seemingly the previous night at the sound check, nerves had got the better of him, and he had said that he just couldn't do it. With a tangible sense of relief Harrison saw him anxiously waiting in the wings. 'I'd like to bring on a friend of us all, Mr. Bob Dylan', he announced.

The response was immediate. Dylan took the stage looking nervous but inspired, wearing a denim jacket, and after a few moments adjusting the height of the microphones he launched into a superb *A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall*. The New York audience was in raptures. His twenty minutes on stage consisted of pre-crash material, and he even responded to Harrison's request to perform *Blowin' in the Wind*, a track of total relevance to the occasion. The audience reaction to a now rare public airing of this classic was one of pure emotion.

When Dylan left the stage the resulting standing ovation was genuine and heartfelt. The concert was released as a triple box set and included sets from George Harrison, Ravi Shankar, Ringo Starr, Leon Russell (whom Dylan had briefly worked with earlier in the year on *When I Paint My Masterpiece*), Badfinger's Pete Ham and Billy Preston. Dylan's set was given a full side of vinyl as he ran through *A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall*, *It*

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*Takes a Lot to Laugh/It Takes a Train to Cry*, *Blowin' in the Wind*, *Mr. Tambourine Man* and *Just Like a Woman*. Backed by half the Beatles and Leon Russell the result is somewhat patchy, but most importantly it confirmed that Dylan was not only alive and well but could still dominate any performance.

One more live performance followed later that year when Dylan celebrated New Year's Eve with a surprise appearance at The Band's concert at the Academy of Music in New York. Despite the obvious chemistry between Dylan and the members of The Band, and the rapturous response from the crowd of more than 3,000 in attendance, Dylan did not take up the offer of further live concerts. Instead he busied himself by releasing another piece of Dylan controversy, the single *George Jackson*, dedicated to the late black activist who had recently died whilst serving a prison sentence.

When Dylan went to see Allen Ginsberg's poetry recital at Greenwich Village it sparked a new idea. Dylan started an experimental project of recording improvised poetry, but unfortunately it sadly sounded better in theory than in reality, and the intended album was not released. Ginsberg, who died in 1997, later worked with Dylan again during the *Rolling Thunder Revue* tour. Several more ad hoc appearances followed, such as his unannounced contribution to a (then largely unknown) John Prine gig in New York. In July 1972 Dylan was in the audience at New York's Madison Square Garden as Elvis returned from his lost years. Later that year he was also spotted at a Rolling Stones concert at the same venue. These two concerts may have acted as his inspiration to perform live again. Firstly though, Dylan had to go to the depths of Mexico to begin a comeback from an altogether different direction.

It had been a long, quiet three-year gap before Dylan emerged, rather strangely, alongside James Coburn and Kris Kristofferson on the set of Sam Peckinpah's movie *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*. Dylan had been sent the script and wanted to write the soundtrack to the film. There was no better person to do that of course, despite Peckinpah's original insistence that Roger Miller should write it.

Peckinpah had quite a reputation for bizarre behaviour, but Dylan, a film buff, knew of his work and eventually asked if there might be a cameo role for him to fill. Pat Garrett's own memoirs referred to a person known only as 'Alias', and when Peckinpah heard Dylan's already prepared track *Billy* he was visibly affected and immediately offered him the role.

**Bob Dylan onstage with Rick Danko (bass) and Robbie Robertson (guitar) of The Band at Madison Square Garden, New York, on 30 January 1974.**

The cast convened to Durango, Mexico where the project suffered a series of mishaps, fights and typically paranoiac behaviour by the hard drinking director and cast. Equipment malfunctions and monetary problems made each day an unpredictable event. 'Alias' meanwhile had been all but left off the page until his first scenes showed the director just what a charismatic presence he had on hand. When Dylan completed his perfectly pitched soundtrack for the movie in Los Angeles and the album was finally released, it resulted in a much-overlooked masterpiece among the Dylan catalogue. To capture the death scene of the sheriff in the film Dylan wrote *Knockin' On Heaven's Door* and in doing so produced one of his most memorable tracks ever.

When Dylan left Columbia for Asylum Records his old label released a collection of out-takes and discarded tracks dating back to the *Self Portrait* and *New Morning* sessions under the unimaginative title *Dylan*. It was instantly forgettable, and Dylan began to work on what would become the following year's *Planet Waves*.

The apparent domestic contentment since the motorbike crash that he had craved, thrived upon and was clearly inspired by was slowly derailing. During attempts to rebuild his relationship with Sara the couple had visited California, and soon after, in the spring of 1973, they took a lease on a house in Malibu. It was a period that saw Dylan working once again with California based Roger McGuinn of

the Byrds, a relationship that continued into the *Rolling Thunder Revue* tour.

Meanwhile The Band had enjoyed a hugely successful concert at Watkins Glen in front of three hundred thousand appreciative fans. Soon after, Robbie Robertson, now eager to get down to the business of producing new music, arrived in Malibu and sought out Dylan. The conflict between the need to go out on the road and returning to the life that had nearly destroyed him and his marriage was now unbearable. Sara knew exactly what life on the road could do to Dylan and desperately attempted to keep him safely ensconced in domesticity.

The result of the collaboration with Robertson and The Band in Malibu was the 1974 album *Planet Waves*. The album was recorded in just three days and remains the only ever studio album from the partnership. Kicking off with the lively *On a Night Like This*, the record moves into altogether darker territory with the wonderfully evocative *Going, Going, Gone*. Famous for including two different versions of *Forever Young*, written for his son, it moves through the disturbing self examination of his marriage to Sara with the track *Dirge*, before ending on a contradictory note with *Wedding Song*.

Dylan could resist the desire to perform no more and returned to the road. The accompanying tour was captured superbly on the live album *Before the Flood*. The album featured The Band and was recorded in the huge venues they frequented on the tour. The album is a must for fans of Dylan or The Band as it fully captures the power of them together, and once again proves beyond any doubt that the collective musicianship among The Band was second to none.

The tour kicked off in Chicago during the first week of 1974 in front of nearly twenty thousand fans. As Dylan sang the line 'Even the President of the United States sometimes has to stand naked' (from *It's Alright Ma*), it perfectly captured the mood of a country awash with the Watergate scandal. The tour was a massive success commercially and Dylan had once again stepped out onto the world stage and proved to everyone, including himself, that he could still do it all at the highest of levels. In the words of the Woodstock anthem performed by Crosby, Stills & Nash it had been a long time coming. The live album *Before the Flood*, was taken predominantly from the last show of the tour in Los Angeles and proved to be a massive commercial hit. The tour ended with Dylan safely reunited with Sara. It was hard to tell who was the most relieved.

Once the 1974 tour was over, the gaps that had opened within Dylan's marriage were becoming insurmountable. The appearance of Ellen Bernstein in his Malibu based life, finally signalled the end of his relationship. Ironically the sadness and pain that hallmarked the end of his marriage to Sara resulted in one of the most priceless albums of his career. The the roots of Dylan's next project go way back to that fateful morning when he had slammed on his brakes and lost control of his motorbike. However, even knowing the story of Dylan's subsequent rollercoaster, nothing could have prepared the world for what was to come next – his masterpiece *Blood on the Tracks*.

# THIN LIZZY

## THROUGH THE EYES OF PHIL LYNOTT

The Thin Lizzy story has been recounted by various authors and journalists, each one drawing upon a vast circle of friends, acquaintances and newspaper cuttings to document Lynott's life and career. One voice, however, is conspicuously absent from all of these accounts – Phil Lynott himself. This article rectifies that omission. Here we explore the Lizzy story from Lynott's own perspective, the events that he considered to have moulded his career and his life, and the songs that he believed shaped it.

**By 1969, Phil Lynott linked up with Brian Downey, a drummer he'd known since his earliest days on the youth club circuit, and they formed the band, Orphanage. Lynott was playing rhythm guitar then,** 'because Pat Quigley, our bassist, was better than I was, and it was great because the sort of venues we were playing, we'd always wind up with other people joining us onstage. Gary Moore used to drop in, and the other guys from Skid Row [the band in which both Lynott and Moore first played professionally] and Sugar Shack [Downey's last band], and Terry Woods, who was I think starting out with Steeleye Span at the time, so everybody thought of him as a folkie, but he'd come down. We'd be playing Hendrix and The Who and stuff like that, and he'd kick straight into it.'

The end for Orphanage came with the arrival of Eric Bell in Dublin, a Belfast native best known for his time with Van Morrison's Them. Hooking up with another former member of that same band, keyboard player Eric Wrixon, Bell originally intended only to hijack Orphanage's drummer. But he was captivated by Lynott, all the more so after discovering that the singer could also play bass – the one instrument missing from the ensemble.

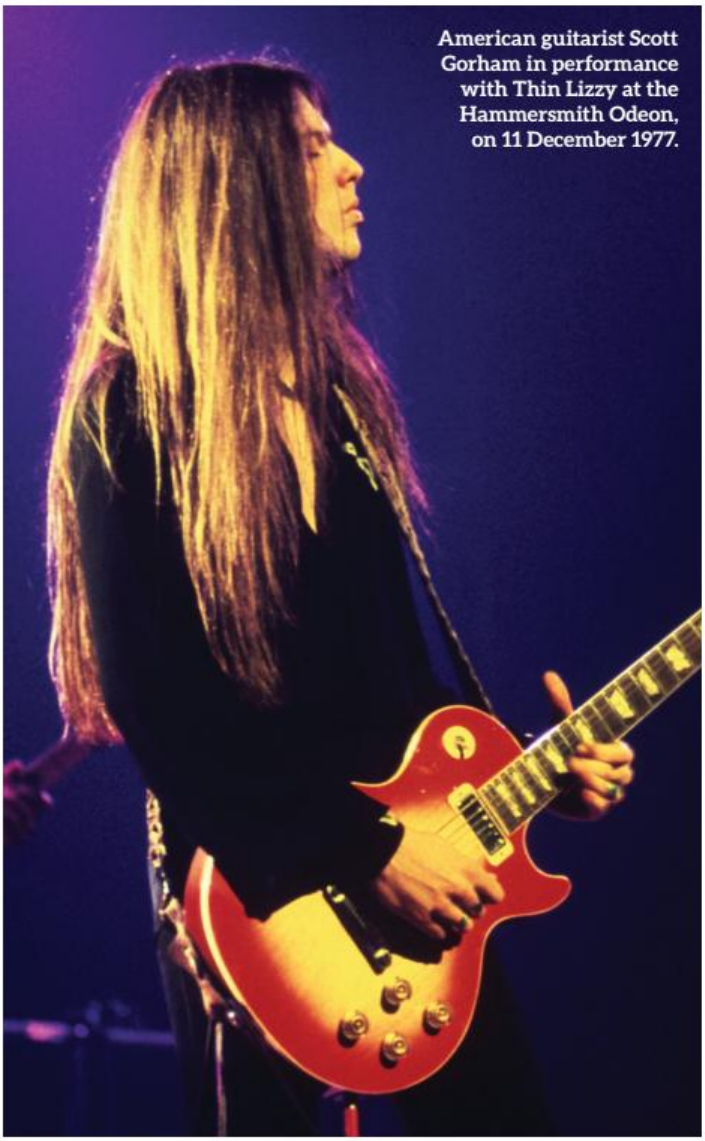
> 'The kids weren't so bad. They took the piss at first because I was different, but once I proved that I wasn't... they settled down. It was their parents and the older generation who were a problem, who were calling me names, shouting things in the street, all that shit.'
>
> PHIL LYNOTT

The new group began playing at the Countdown Club, which is where they got down to the serious business of finding a name for the band.

**'Eric [Bell] wanted to call us Tin Lizzie, which was a cartoon in *The Dandy*, and we all hated it, but we never came up with anything better. The only other name that was in with a shout was *Gulliver's Travels*, so Tin Lizzie was looking better all the time.'**

The only drawback was the possibility that the comic's publishers might object, but the Dublin contingent had a way around that difficulty. Depending upon how thick one's accent was, the words 'tin' and 'thin' could share a very similar pronunciation. Spelled 'Thin', it still sounded like 'Tin'. Another swift fix transformed Lizzie to Lizzy and, in mid-February the new band announced its existence to the local press.

Lizzy played their first live show at the Countdown Club on 5 March and over the next three or four months built themselves a fierce local following. To supplement the band's meagre income, Lynott and Bell had also taken to playing the occasional acoustic



American guitarist Scott Gorham in performance with Thin Lizzy at the Hammersmith Odeon, on 11 December 1977.

Alongside Gorham, Brian Robertson, seen here in 1978, was a critical part of Thin Lizzy's signature sound, that showcased twin lead guitars.

show around the Dublin folk circuit, breaking in original material alongside the expected traditional airs.

**'A lot of our early songs, the first couple of albums, came out of those sort of shows. That's why the first album in particular sounds like that, because we were playing for a folk audience and a rock audience, so we wanted to keep them both happy. Which was important because it stopped us becoming just another Irish hard rock band. Everybody was trying to sound like Taste in those days, which was great – I loved Taste. But I didn't want to be Taste as well.'**

On 4 July, Lizzy played at St Aidan's Hall, one of their biggest gigs yet. They were the opening act – the Urge and Granny's Intentions were billed ahead of them. But conscious of the grandiose surroundings, they chose to transform the show into an industry showcase. The major label Parlophone were impressed and agreed to release a one-off single by the band. A few weeks later the quartet descended upon Trend Studios to record.

**'It was awful,'** Lynott shuddered. **'We'd all recorded in the past; I'd even recorded some demos at Trend a few years earlier. But none of the Lizzy songs were ready to be recorded, we had *The Farmer* and that was going to be the A-side, but the B-side, I had to go with a song I'd sung for the guy who owned the studio, John D'Ardis, called *I Need You*. He'd written it and asked me to record a demo of it while I was there one time.'**

A lazy country blues number cut firmly in the mould of The Band called *The Farmer* was released in July 1970. In keeping with the size (or lack thereof) of the Irish music scene, Parlophone pressed just 500 copies of *The Farmer*.

It was decided that more would be manufactured if there was enough demand. On this occasion, however, there wasn't and *The Farmer* shifted just 283 copies. Finances were tight too, which was one reason for the decision to let Lizzy's keyboard player Wrixon go.

**'Having said that we didn't want to be Taste, there was also an economy to that three piece line-up that made a lot of sense. Keyboards were great, but they were also a luxury. I think, also, we had this image of ourselves as a great powerful noise – drums, bass and guitar, like Taste, but also like The Who and Jimi, so even if the material wasn't quite there, the intention was. So Eric was out and, funnily enough, that's when things started to change for us.'**

In December 1970, Thin Lizzy were signed to Decca Records in London, but it was not to be a happy relationship.

**'The problem with Decca was the label was becoming a joke. It was different during the sixties when they had the Stones, but once they left the label – which was right before we signed – things just fell apart. They had a lot of great blues bands, Ten Years After, Savoy Brown, people like that. But you got the feeling that nobody at the company actually knew what any of the bands were about, or even understood what a band was.'**

**Phil Lynott on stage at the Empire Pool (the original name for Wembley Arena) on 22 June 1978.**

'...we were still street fighters and poets and guerrillas and rockers, and all those other things we dreamed of becoming when we first started.'
– Phil Lynott

Evidence of that was obvious immediately. Lizzy's debut album was recorded in a matter of days at Decca's West Hampstead facility, where producer Scott English apparently mixed it in just forty-eight hours. The artwork, moreover, was a nightmare from start to finish.

**'They wouldn't listen to any of my ideas, so finally I compromised, and said, "Okay, your idea of a Tin Lizzy automobile isn't so bad, let's go with that." But of course they couldn't find a Tin Lizzy, so they just slapped on any old vintage car. Then I was looking at the sleeve and they'd spelled our name wrong again. Tin Lizzy. So I pointed it out and I'll never forget this. They were, "Oh well, you'll just have to change the band's name." What? "Yeah, because nobody's heard of Thin Lizzy, so what difference will it make?"... The bastards delayed the album's release for a week while the artwork was fixed and they charged us for it as well, like it was our fault.'**

*Thin Lizzy* the album was never expected to make more than a minor impact, and so it proved. No single was lifted from the album, and advertising was minimal. Any media types who encountered the band did so under their own steam – but those who did fall for the record's charms did so in a big way. On Radio Luxembourg, DJ Kid Jensen elected *Thin Lizzy* his number one album of the week and played most of its contents at least once. At the BBC, John Peel was more restrained, but nevertheless aired a few tracks, while fellow DJ Stuart Henry booked the band in for a session in early July.

Despite such advances, Decca had lost all interest in promoting the group. Thin Lizzy's suggestion that they return to the studio and cut a new album was shrugged away; the label's one concession was to admit that it may have been a mistake not to pull a single from the album, and offered the band the opportunity to make amends.

The result was an EP titled *New Day* that was released at the end of August, shortly after Thin Lizzy headlined a triumphant homecoming show at Dublin's National Theatre. There, a sold out crowd treated them like conquering heroes, and it was not long before Decca announced it was time for Lizzy to begin work on their second album. Thin Lizzy began recording at the up-and-coming De Lane Lea Studio in London.

**'We thought we were ready, but when you're on the road playing songs every night, you really don't think about them in terms of how they'll sound in the studio. It was only when Nick [*New Day* producer Nick Tauber] had us play through the material, and started pointing out everything that was wrong with it... there were a few songs on there that I'm still proud of, and a lot of the ideas were solid. But the album was too rushed – the difficult second album.'**

With a March release for *New Day* looming, Lizzy was back on the road once more, touring the UK in February 1971. First for two months heading around the clubs on a bill with Decca label mates Arrival, then out again around the colleges.

Thin Lizzy during a performance in 1979.
Left to right: Gary Moore, Phil Lynott and Scott Gorham.

In the autumn of 1972, Lizzy was booked to go on the road with Slade and Suzi Quatro. It was one of the must-see tours of the season, yet Lizzy almost blew it in Newcastle on the first night of the tour, 3 November.

**'We were used to playing small clubs and colleges at the time, with just the occasional bigger show back home. And we had our audience, who would stand around, listen, and applaud. It was all very cool, very macho. But the audience on the Slade tour, they were kids and they wanted to jump around and scream and wet themselves and get excited and, after that first show, Chas Chandler, who was Slade's manager, came backstage and said "If you can't give the kids what they want, you might as well go home now." Because we just stood there and played. That was the turning point. The next turning point, that was when we realized there were two types of band; there were the ones that gave the audience a good time, and the ones that didn't.'**

On the Slade tour, audiences applauded through the bulk of Lizzy's set, but went wild when their new single *Whiskey in the Jar* came around – and that was even before radio picked up on it. The single didn't make the British charts until the New Year (when it climbed to No. 6). But it was No. 1 in Ireland by Christmas 1972.

**'We've always had a very strange relationship with that song. At the time, we were loving it. We knew it was a hit even before it was in the charts, there was just something about it, and we pushed it as hard as we could. Later, particularly after the business with Eric [Bell], we started talking about how much we hated it, and we hadn't wanted Decca to put it out, and how we were railroaded into becoming this pop novelty band that rocked up traditional folk songs. But that was all bollocks. We had to try and distance ourselves from the hit, because we were suddenly appealing to a different audience. But shit, I loved that song, and I still do.'**

> 'We realized there were two types of band; there were the ones that gave the audience a good time, and the ones that didn't.'
>
> PHIL LYNOTT

The following spring, *Whiskey* finally dropped out of the chart after three solid months, and everybody – management, the label, the fans, the media – began agitating for a follow-up.

**'Somebody actually said we should put out *Danny Boy* from the *Funky Junction* album. Go in, put on some lyrics. Eric's playing on that was shit hot, total Hendrix rock. But that would have been taking the piss too far. We went with *Randolph's Tango* instead, and Decca really worked their arses off for that one.'**

**'We did *John Peel*, we did *Diddy David Hamilton*, we did *Crackerjack*... did we do *Crackerjack* for *Randolph*? Maybe we didn't. Maybe that was *Whiskey* as well. But we did a load of promotion, and what happened? Nothing. It just sank and then people were back to saying maybe we really should have put out *Danny Boy*, because it would probably have been enormous.'**

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While *Randolph's Tango* slipped away, Lizzy and Nick Tauber returned to the studio to begin work on what would become Lizzy's third album, *Vagabonds of the Western World*. This included another Thin Lizzy classic, *The Rocker*.

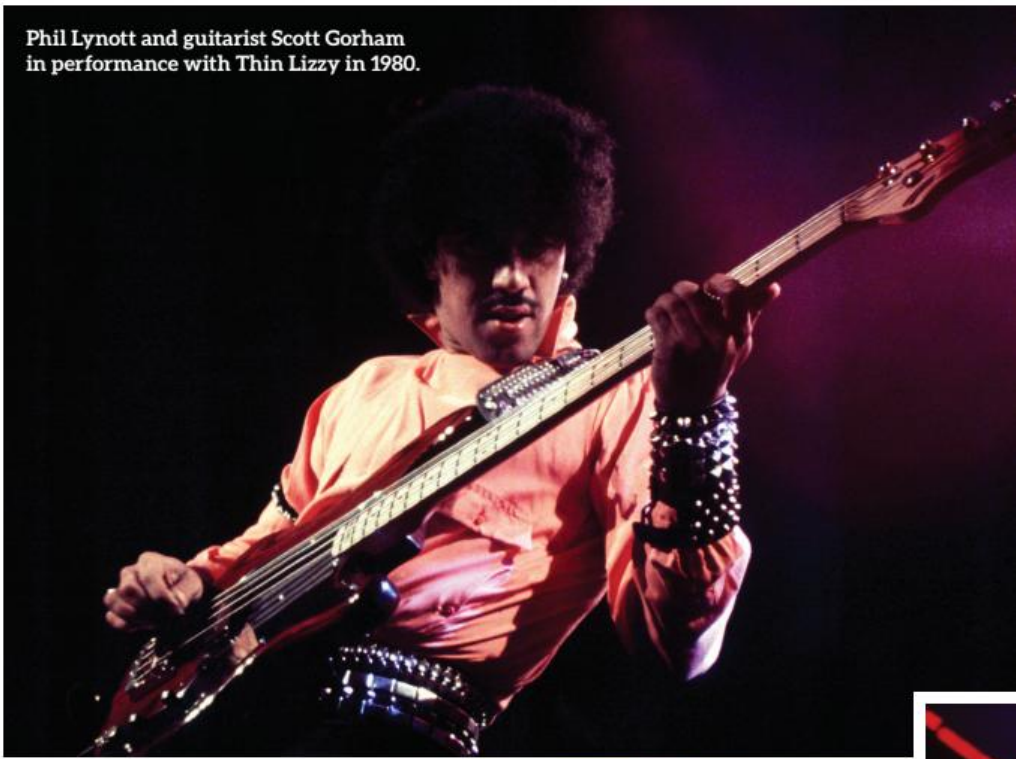
**'*The Rocker* was the start of us trying to get away from *Whiskey in the Jar*, rightly or wrongly. It was us sending out a message to everybody who thought we were this funny little Irish band. But, it was also me telling Eric to stop worrying, that we might have had a huge pop thing, but we were still the same band at heart, we were still street fighters and poets and guerrillas and rockers, and all those other things we dreamed of becoming when we first started.'**

Bell had been growing increasingly unhappy over the past months, both with the band, and with his own health problems. He had suffered at least one heart attack while on the road with the band, and was essentially flaunting his doctors' advice every time he set foot on stage. Now, he was becoming increasingly conscious of the fact that he was doing so in pursuit of a dream – fame, fortune and pop stardom – that he no longer believed in. He quit in the middle of a blazing backstage row and Thin Lizzy were left as a duo. A panicked phone call brought Gary Moore to town – he had just six hours in which to rehearse the set before Lizzy went back out on the road.

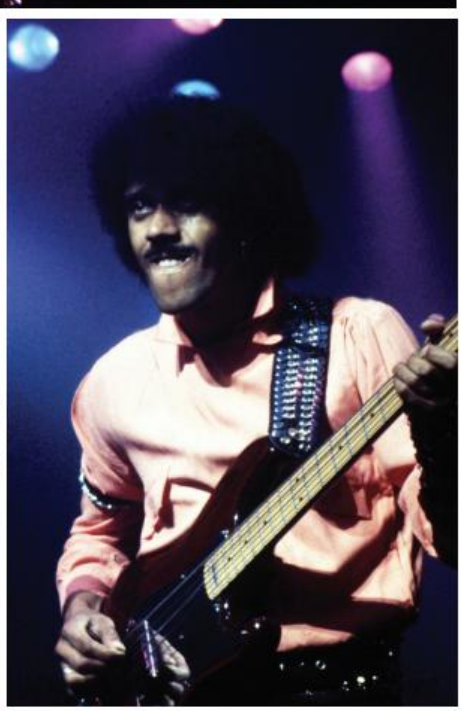
Decca were still owed a new single, and the band – with Moore still aboard – rushed into the studio to cut half an album's worth of new material. *Little Darling* was the final Decca single, but the band still recorded a demo tape for Decca aimed at landing the band a new record deal.

Unfortunately Gary Moore had only ever joined the band as a stop-gap and it was soon time for him to depart. Thin Lizzy played a German tour in spring 1974 with former Atomic Rooster guitarist John DuCann and Andy Gee (ex-Steve Ellis' Ellis) filling the void, but the shows were barely up to Lizzy's usual standards and, by the time the band returned home, Brian Downey was talking seriously of quitting. At the same time, DuCann had more or less ruled himself out of any further work with the band, whilst Andy Gee was squeezed out under the terms of the solo contract he'd signed with CBS.

Thin Lizzy played their final show of the era at the Marquee on 2 May 1974, and, though it was only for a few short weeks, there was a moment when Thin Lizzy comprised Lynott alone, without even a record deal for company.



Phil Lynott and guitarist Scott Gorham in performance with Thin Lizzy in 1980.

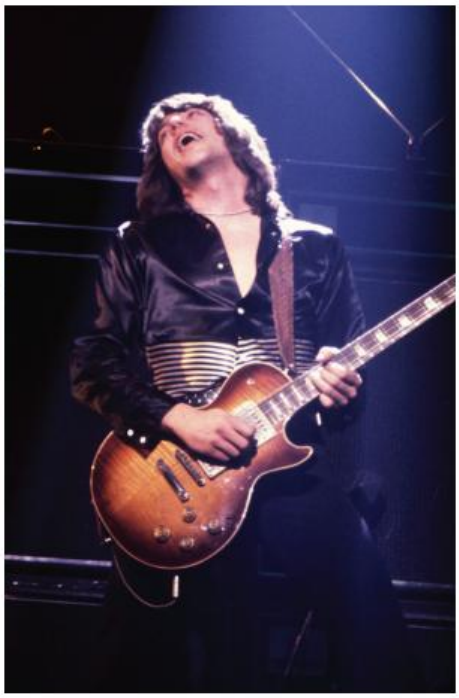


**'The fucking management team outnumbered the musicians. I never want to go through anything like that again.'**

Lynott's first task, as he attempted to rebuild the shattered Lizzy, was to persuade Downey to reconsider his decision to depart. That accomplished, the duo then took up residence at the Iroquo Country Club in Hampstead and spent much of May and June auditioning for a new guitarist. They ended up with two, Scotsman Brian Robertson and American Scott Gorham.

**'The twin guitars thing was something I had wanted to try for a long time, but of course Eric would never have gone along with it. That's why, after Gary [Moore] left, we brought in Cann and Gee, to see what it would sound like. And it was great. On the nights when everything gelled, it was great. It just didn't work as often as I wanted with that line-up, but once Robbo and Scotty came in, we could turn it on like a tap.'**

Vertigo Records was interested in signing the band, but wanted to catch a live show first. On 9 July, with just a handful of warm-up gigs behind them, Lizzy took over the Marquee where they,



**'played the show of our fucking lives. Vertigo didn't stand a chance, they had to sign us or they'd never have forgiven themselves. We dropped all the old slow stuff; *Whiskey* as well. We went with the hard stuff, the rock stuff, because that's what sounded best and that's what I was writing a lot of. We dressed the part as well. As soon as we got the Vertigo advance, we were down the Kings Road shopping, leather jackets, studs, hardnut flash.'**

Vertigo was impatient and immediately called for an album. With just a handful of fully realized new songs in hand, the band set to work on what would become *Nightlife*, a record that absolutely contradicted everything that Lynott claimed the band was trying to achieve.

**'Fucking Ron Nevison was our producer, and he thought he was still working with Bad Company or someone like that – someone big and experienced and raring to go. Whereas we were a brand new band all over again with a couple of members who'd made records in the past, and a couple who'd scarcely even seen a studio before. He just didn't get that, Ron didn't, and while the album had its moments, it could have been better. It should have been.'**

Despite the disappointment when *Nightlife* sold scarcely any better than its predecessors, Lizzy were on a roll and work on Lizzy's fifth album got underway. Unfortunately material was at a premium yet again. Life on the road gnawed away at time the band might have otherwise spent writing songs. Indeed, their first attempt at the album was, if not summarily rejected by Vertigo, at least sent back for revision – four songs were dropped, and four new ones brought in.

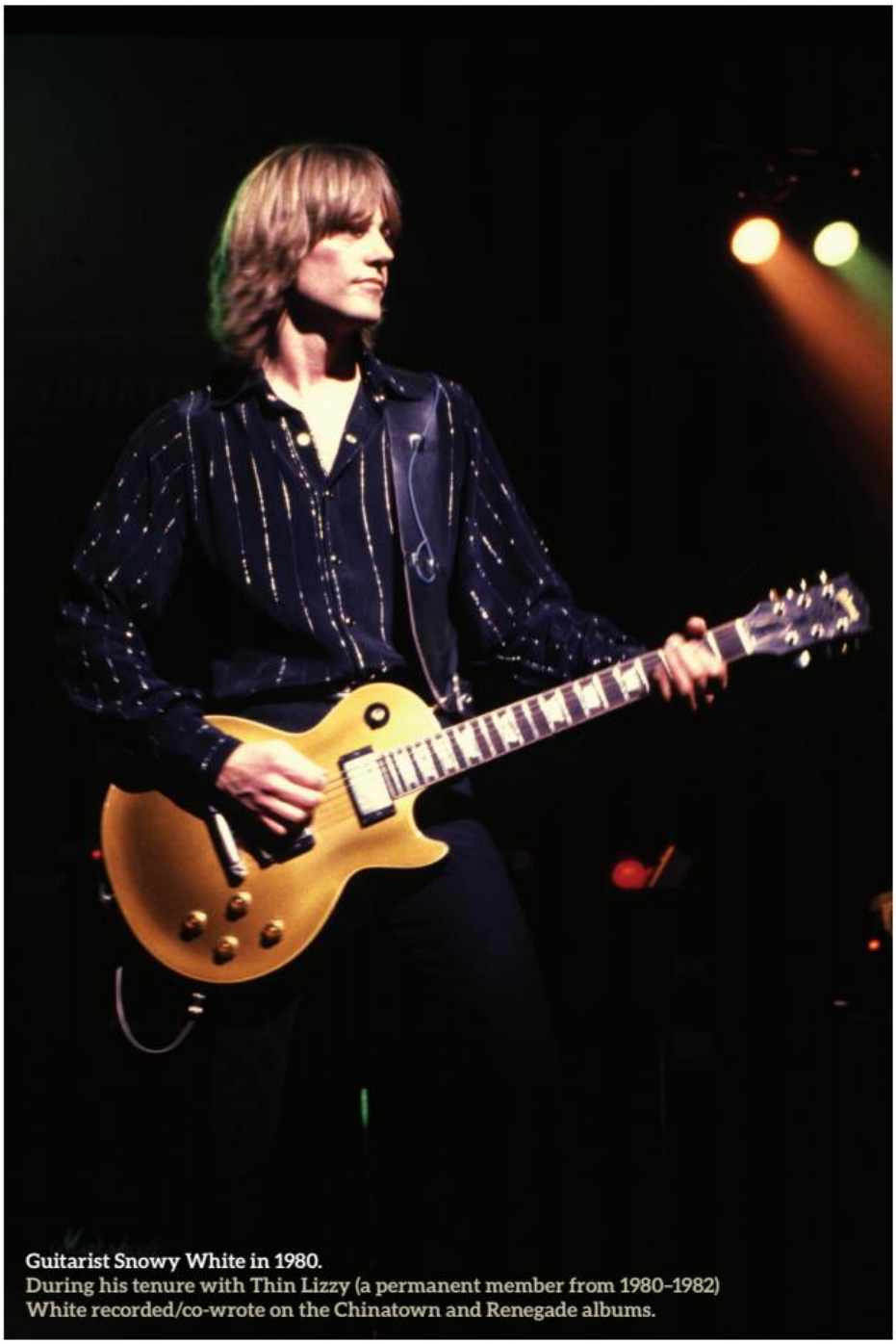
**'When they rejected *Fighting*, the first version, my immediate response was – you bastards. But then I thought about what they said, this one guy in particular, and listened to the songs, and maybe yeah, he was right, because I tried to envisage playing those same songs at the end of a long tour, or in years to come, and I couldn't do it. Plus, he was offering us an extra ten grand to come up with four new songs, so that's what we did.'**

Thin Lizzy's reputation and renown at this point was very much as a live band. Yet the band simply couldn't translate its live energy onto vinyl, and songs that raised the roof in concert scarcely bothered the stylus on vinyl.

**'Nobody could figure out why that was. We had the songs, everybody knew that. We knew our way around the studio, and we couldn't blame the producer because we produced *Fighting* ourselves. But there was something missing. And then I was talking with [producer] John Alcock one day and he asked to hear the band demos and I was, "What band demos?" That was it. We'd go from me writing a song, through a rehearsal, onto the stage and then into the studio, without ever really stopping to think about what we were doing, or what we could be doing.'**

The band booked into a remote farmhouse for three weeks to run through new material, polish it to perfection and set about physically crafting an album before they even thought about taking it into the studio. The result was the record that finally confirmed all of the promise the band had ever displayed but not quite delivered; it remains one of the quintessential rock classics of the seventies.

*Jailbreak* was completed just as the band set out on their next British tour, a high octane outing with the newly emergent Graham Parker & the Rumour as support. Three months in America followed, and again Lizzy were on fire every night. *The Boys Are Back in Town*, the first single from the album, was a hit and advance orders for *Jailbreak* were mounting up.



**Guitarist Snowy White in 1980.**
During his tenure with Thin Lizzy (a permanent member from 1980–1982) White recorded/co-wrote on the Chinatown and Renegade albums.

Lizzy returned home, and Lynott headed straight up to his mother's hotel in Manchester to recuperate and start writing for the next album, which was set for release barely six months after *Jailbreak* under the title *Johnny the Fox*. Whilst he worked, *The Boys Are Back in Town* took off in the UK as well, racing into the Top 10. A second single, the album's title track, only scratched the Top 30, but still there was no doubt that Lizzy had finally made it and they did so at the most opportune time imaginable. Punk rock was coming, but it had yet to make any records. So Lizzy made them instead.

**'The reason punk rock never affected us is because we weren't afraid of it. A lot of the other bands around at the time, they heard things like the Pistols and the Clash… no, they didn't hear it, they read about it, and they thought, "Oh, fuck that, all the spitting and throwing up and they can't play anyway." They didn't hear the energy and the honesty. We did – or, I did anyway, and that was what made the difference. We understood.'**

By the time punk hit its stride in 1977, Thin Lizzy were on a roll. *Johnny the Fox* consolidated Thin Lizzy's emergence from the cult confines in which they had hitherto spent their time. The band was already at work on their next record, *Bad Reputation*, and their latest British tour saw them flying high in the biggest venues yet.

*Bad Reputation* was previewed in the stores by a new single, the lascivious funk shuffle of *Dancing in the Moonlight*. The single has been described by Tony Visconti as 'the sexiest record I ever produced,' and by Lynott as 'everybody's first girlfriend, and one of mine as well.' The single eased a whole new audience into the band's encampment, and the next biggest priority was to keep them there. Determined to capitalise on their high profile Lizzy released a live album, recorded at a variety of shows over the previous year or so, and touched up by a few days in the studio recording overdubs.

Unfortunately on 6 July 1978 Lynott and Robertson had another of their bust ups when Thin Lizzy played in Ibiza. Robertson was out for good this time and was swiftly replaced by Gary Moore. Phil Lynott then spent some time toying with his pet project the Greedy Bastards – a sort of super group that included Steve Jones, Paul Cook, Chris Spedding and Jimmy Bain. Before long though it was time to hit the road with Lizzy again, and in August the band was due to depart for a tour taking in America, New Zealand and Australia. With almost grinding inevitability however, their plans could not be permitted to pass off without incident as Brian Downey declared himself hors de combat. Brian had recently contracted pneumonia and was exhausted, jaded and sick of the sight of the stage. He announced he would not be joining the band in on the first leg of the tour in America.

Mark Nauseef, the American drummer who featured in an early version of the Ian Gillan Band, quickly replaced Downey. Nauseef saw the band through the States, and on a visit to Australia and New Zealand later in the year. However, once the band returned to London Downey was waiting to step back on board to set about recording the *Black Rose: A Rock Legend* album.

**'Everybody says it but its true – you have a hit and people immediately start telling you that the follow up is the most important thing you'll ever do, which just makes me laugh because every time we were put in that position, after *Whiskey*, after *Jailbreak*, and after the live album, we've always fucked it up.'**

*Black Rose: A Rock Legend* was released in April 1979 to widespread critical acclaim, and shot to No. 2 in the UK charts. The album has been referred to as the last classic Thin Lizzy release, and this may be fair as cracks within the band were widening by the day. The album's recording sessions were marred

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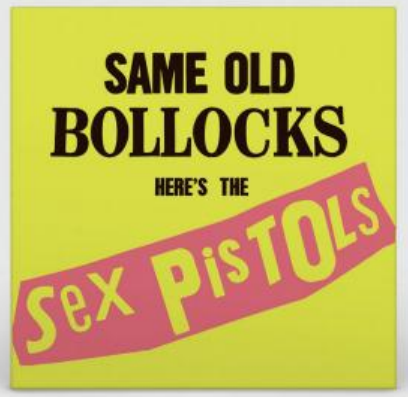


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**Thin Lizzy onstage at the Manchester Apollo in 1983 during the band's farewell tour. Left to right: John Sykes, Phil Lynott, Scott Gorham and Darren Wharton.**

**'...after *Whiskey*, after *Jailbreak*, and after the live album, we've always fucked it up.' – Phil Lynott**

by band tensions, and drug use within the group was beginning to spiral out of control. Lynott was unrepentant about his reliance on heroin, not only arguing that it made him a better writer and performer, but even insisting that Lizzy's own reputation as street fighting hoodlums, living outside of the law, demanded it.

The band embarked on a supporting tour of the US but on one night in July 1979, Gary Moore suddenly walked out. Left without an essential member, Thin Lizzy struggled on for a few dates before Midge Ure was brought in to replace him for the remainder of the tour. At that time Ure was a former teeny bop idol (a vocalist with one hit wonders Slik) that had more recently washed up in former Sex Pistol Glen Matlock's Rich Kids. He had one evening to learn the band's set. Thankfully the nature of the tour seldom saw them play for more than fifty minutes an evening, and he pulled it off with aplomb.

**'Midge was great, it got so that we didn't want him to leave and we kept thinking of new reasons for him to stay. Like, oh we really need keyboards; can you stick around and play? And wouldn't it be great if we had three guitars on such and such a song. And he was having a great time as well, so he'd be on the phone to Ultravox saying sorry, but something else has come up, and can you hold on a while longer?'**

Ure also joined Lynott in the studio where he was reworking a handful of Lizzy's earliest recordings for the forthcoming compilation album *The Continuing Saga of the Ageing Blue Orphans*.

Sadly all good things must come to an end, and with Ure finally heeding Ultravox's call, Lizzy rebuilt the group around Snowy White and keyboard player Darren Wharton alongside the core that was Lynott, Downey and Gorham.

Thin Lizzy's spring 1980 UK tour was intended to road test both the new line-up and the material that they were recording for their next album, *Chinatown*. Under rehearsed and, it seemed, less than enthusiastic, it was a disappointing outing – a fate that the album itself would echo.

The nature of the band had changed, and so had the band's own self-perception. There were times on stage and in interviews when Lynott appeared to have forgotten his role as a musician and songwriter. Instead he regarded himself as a personality, a celebrity even and one whose importance utterly belied Lizzy's own visibly declining status.

*Chinatown* stumbled no higher than No. 7 in the charts, while its successor, *Renegade*, faltered at No. 38. Similarly, although the band had never taken hit singles for granted, *Killer On the Loose* was their last Top 10 single, and their most unmemorable. Subsequent 45s slipped by unnoticed, debuting somewhere in the lower reaches of the chart and then fading away.

Lynott's own reliability was now being called into question as his drug use soared. 1981's *Renegade* album certainly suffered from his apparent lack of interest, while buying tickets for the accompanying tour some nights felt akin to playing Russian Roulette. Would

In September 1982, at the age of twenty-three, John Sykes was asked by Phil Lynott to join Thin Lizzy, filling the position vacated by previous guitarist Snowy White.

Lynott be on form tonight? Or, more likely, would he not?

It was clear that Thin Lizzy was dead, and now awaited nothing more than a formal farewell – the last rites that Lynott attempted to deliver with the release of his second solo album, *The Phil Lynott Album*, in October 1982.

Had his solo career taken off, Lynott later admitted, he could have knocked Thin Lizzy on the head there and then, paying off the band's debts himself, and getting on with his life. Instead, he grimaced, the group was too broke to break up; in fact, it was teetering on the brink of bankruptcy. There was no alternative but to raise the beast from the dead, to go out with one final flourish and hope that it paid off.

Downey, Gorham and Wharton remained on board of course. Guitarist John Sykes was drafted in from the Tygers of Pan Tang, and a three-prong assault was formulated. Beginning in March 1983, a new studio album, *Thunder and Lightning*, was accompanied by a farewell tour that was intended to last for as many months as it took to say goodbye to everyone who cared before a new live album wrapped the whole thing up in style.

It paid off. *Thunder and Lighting* became the band's biggest album since *Black Rose*. The tour was a phenomenal sell out, and grown men still tear up when they recall the final moments of the last London show, as the Hammersmith Odeon stage filled with faces from the past. Eric Bell, Brian Downey, Gary Moore… the band went down all guns blazing, playing their last show of all in Nuremberg, Germany, on 4 September 1983.

Thin Lizzy's renown, however, never faded. True, there were a few quiet years during which rock history tried to figure out what to do with their memory, but slowly a new generation of musicians arose, for whom Thin Lizzy was unquestionably one of the all-time rock greats.

The plaudits for Thin Lizzy continue piling up. The late Bill Graham, put it best when he extolled Lynott's colossal impact upon Ireland writing, **'… it is no exaggeration to say [Lynott] was our Elvis Presley, the man who validated rock for a generation of Irishmen and women. He was our first star in an intimate way. Philip Lynott also represented both our values and aspirations… Yes, he was our Elvis.'**

# Bad Company

## *An interview with Simon Kirke*

Since their formation in the early seventies Bad Company have enjoyed a truly impressive career that spanned decades. With over fifteen million records sold to date, they have generated some of the most recognisable hits in rock music. Here we look at their halcyon years of 1974–1980, featuring a rare interview with Simon Kirke.

**The supergroup Bad Company was formed in 1973 when Paul Rodgers and Mick Ralphs decided to collaborate together on an exciting new project. What they created went on to become one of the hardest-rocking acts of the mid-seventies. Although the band has actually continued on over the decades, this was really the peak era for their creative output and wild stage shows.**

In 1973 each member of the group had a successful career with another band, yet many had come disillusioned with these acts and jumped at the chance to expand their horizons as part of the as yet unnamed project. Here, Simon Kirke recalls the formation of Bad Company, and the recruitment of Boz Burrell to the fold.

**'Bad Company was a combination of musicians from three separate groups, Paul and myself from Free, Mick Ralphs from Mott the Hoople and Boz Burrell from King Crimson. Paul had a band called Peace and he toured with Mott the Hoople when Free had one of their breakups. They formed an alliance and got on very well.**

**'So when Mick left Mott and Free was no longer, Mick and Paul got together and they asked if I would like to join and I said I would love to because I just wanted to put Free behind me –it had been such a weight and such a millstone. Mick was wonderful; he was so funny.**

**'Mick and Paul had formed this little bond, and they were blues oriented. Mick was a little more country, so obviously Paul Rodgers and myself had been together for four or five years so we got on pretty well and then Boz was this very laid back, amiable bass player. But he was last on the list of bass players because we hated King Crimson. We had the guy from Supertramp, and this guy, and that guy, and we always put Boz at the bottom because we hated King Crimson. So after we'd been through fifteen bass players we said "Fuck it! We've got to try Boz."**

**'So Boz arrived and he was this great looking guy with a beard, he was tall and so on. So we said "The first key is in G", and he said "Don't tell me anything, I'll just pick it up as I go along", and we thought [rolls eyes] "Well alright, but doesn't he want to know the chords?" But after the first song we knew he was the one. The irony is, that we found out later, he had only been playing bass about eighteen months.**

**'There were egos in the band but we were all seasoned musicians, we all got on well, it was almost as if Free and Mott the Hoople had been almost like training grounds for the whole thing.'**

With all the members in place, the band secured huge record deals with Led Zeppelin's label Swan Song, Atlantic Records and Island. With so much experience behind them, the labels lapped up the offering and Bad Company entered the studio to record their debut album. There was just one thing missing – at this time the band still hadn't decided on a name. Whilst there has been speculation that Bad Company was named after the Jeff Bridges film of the same name, it is something that the band have denied.

**'We toyed with millions of ideas then they [the record label] said, "You better give us a name", then we said "Alright – Bad Company." And that was it, that's how it came about. It's amazing how quickly you get used to it! I hated it when I first heard it. What was that amazing name we had? The Four Millionaire Brothers. Black Bomber, that was one, Sundread Spitfire and the Black Bombers. Concrete Parachute. The Fiddlers! We sat up all night, we all came back to Bad Company in the end.'**

Under the new name of Bad Company the band went forth and enjoyed immediate success. The group gelled and the receptive public eagerly lapped up their heavy and unique sound. Their eponymous debut album *Bad Company* went straight in to the charts and remained there for twenty-five weeks, peaking at No. 3 in the UK. This was a golden time for the band members, having freed themselves of the shackles of their previous associations they were now had the rock world at their feet.

Simon Kirke in 1975. Kirke has been the only continuous member of Bad Company since their inception in 1973.

**'There was just this newfound freedom when Bad Company came together, it was like all the Christmases had come at once and all the ambition was finally being realised. This is what we were going to do, and Jesus, the first year we had a gold album.**

**'Paul sung wonderfully for those first couple of albums, everyone was amazed. Anything I did Mick said "Boy alright that's lovely, great!" There was no analysing or trying different things.'**

Bad Company enjoyed immediate success with their releases, with their first single from the debut album *Can't Get Enough* reaching No. 5 in the charts and *Movin' On* climbing to No. 19. However, among the classic tracks on the debut album, the most distinctive may be the eponymous perennial hit *Bad Company*. A swaggering hard rock number that oozes confidence and succinctly sums up everything the band was about. In

terms of calling cards there could not be a better one for Bad Company and the public sat up and listened.

**'Paul came up with the initial riff on the piano, all the black notes, all the flats and sharps on the piano and he just wanted some help with some lyrics. I just happened to be there and we finished it in twenty minutes. But the thing about *Bad Company* was that it had this feel of riders on the plains on horses, tumbleweed, bounty hunters and outlaws.'**

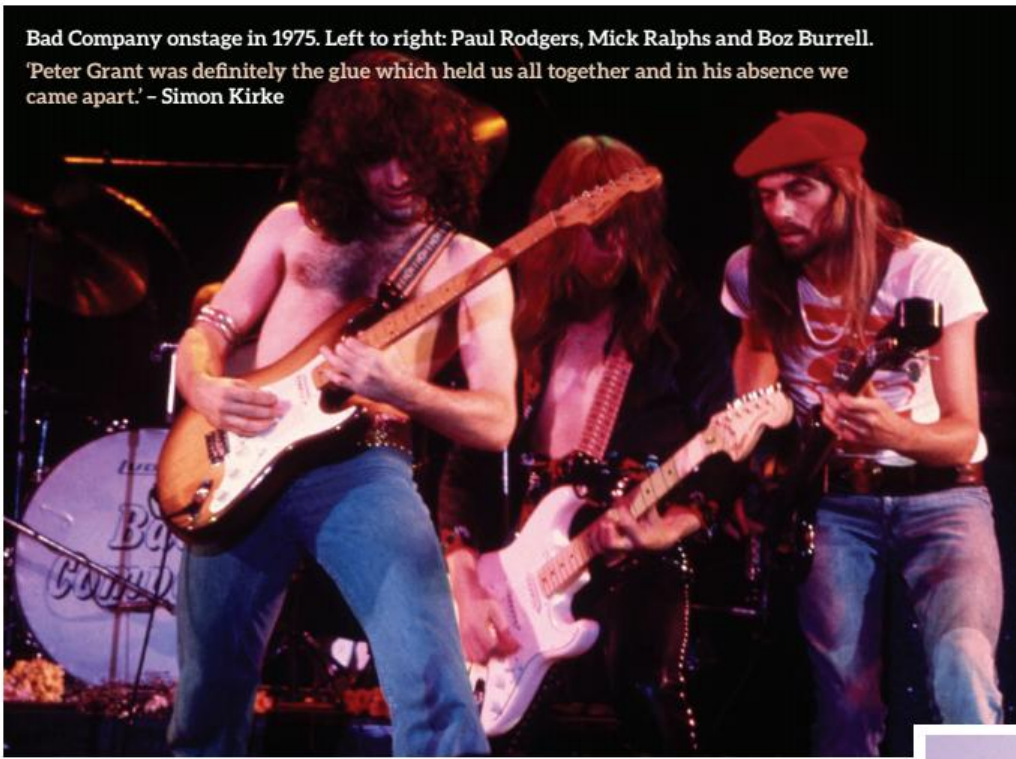
Another hit from the album was *Ready for Love*, a cover of a Mott the Hoople number that proved Bad Company were willing to embrace their past as musicians instead of shying away from it.

**'*Ready for Love* was originally done by Mott the Hoople. It was one of the only songs where Paul said, "Fuck man, I'd like to sing that", and Mick said, "But we've already done it!" And Paul said, "I don't give a shit, I want to record it." So that shows you what a good song it is to sing. It's in A-minor, which is a lovely, sad and melancholic key.**

**'We were mixing the first album when David Bowie and Angie came in because they knew Mick, as he had produced *All The Young Dudes*. They came in whilst we were mixing *Ready for Love*, and she said, "Oh I love this song!" and they were both singing it. It still is one of my favourite songs. Mick said he wrote it in about ten minutes.'**

Despite the occasional cover track, the group excelled at songwriting. Churning out signature bluesy numbers that were hard enough to excite their audience, and gritty enough to feel like they really meant it. Bad Company were fast becoming known for their live performances and they soon became a regular fixture on live TV. These performances were what caught the eye of American executives and soon Bad Company were breaking in to the big time across the pond. They appeared on the US TV show *Don Kirshner's Rock Concert* in October 1974, and wowed the viewing public with a blistering thirty minute set featuring six of their best live numbers.

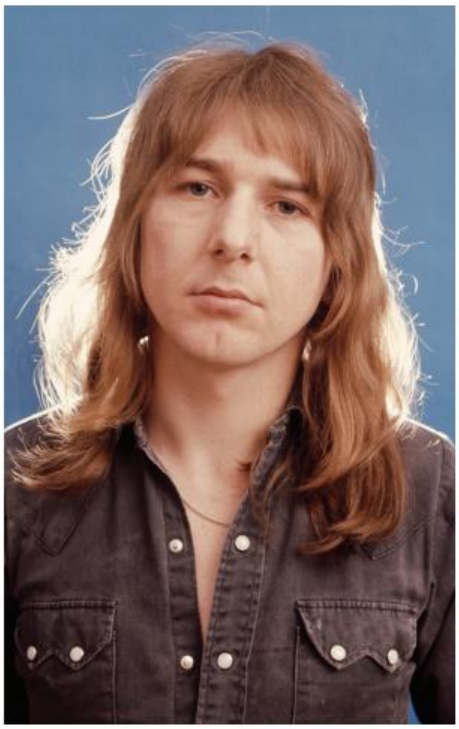
**'We were all great players and it was simple. Mick being a relatively sober guy, he can handle playing rhythm and lead at the same time. Paul also played some guitar so sometimes they would do some dual guitar stuff. There was no weak link in the band, with Free you were always wondering, what's [Paul] Kossoff going to be like today. There was always that reticence between the four of us but with Bad Company everyone was strong. All the songs live are much more intense than their recorded counterparts, but they're two different animals and they can be treated well either way.'**

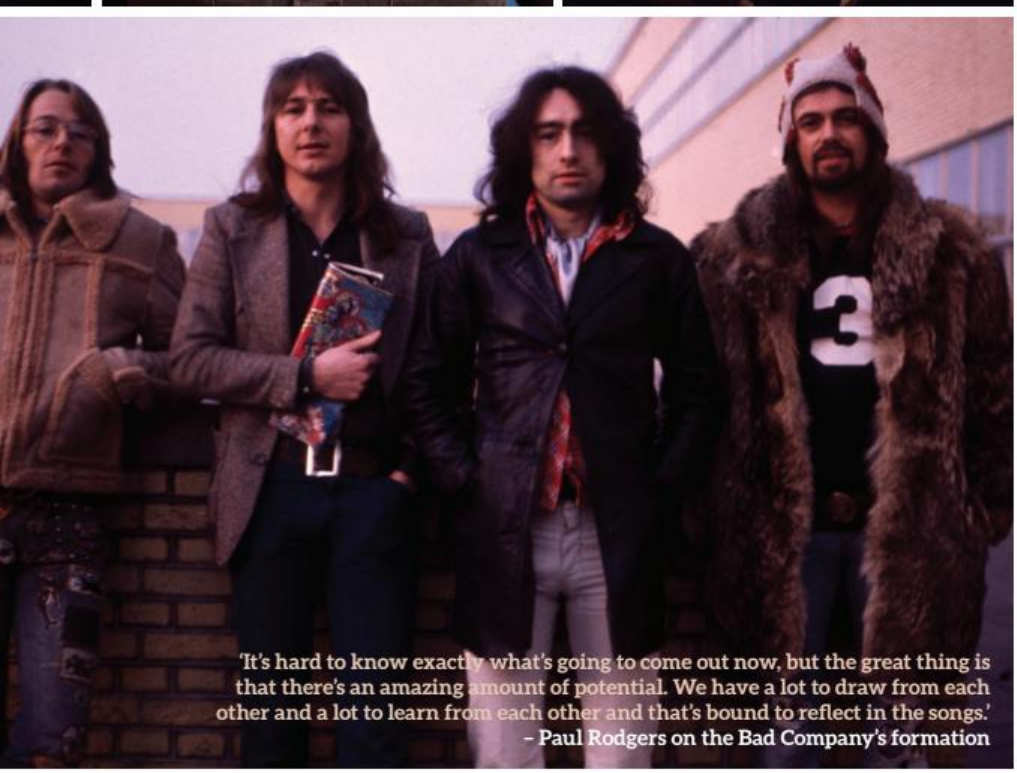


Bad Company onstage in 1975. Left to right: Paul Rodgers, Mick Ralphs and Boz Burrell.
'Peter Grant was definitely the glue which held us all together and in his absence we came apart.' – Simon Kirke

Bad Company's live performances reflected the band's hard rocking lifestyle. They came across as louche but with a cheeky edge that audiences found irresistible. This popularity saw their next album *Straight Shooter* shoot straight to No. 3 in the UK and the US, and it was certified gold by the RCA after just one month. Despite this popularity with the public, the critics were less than impressed overall and *Straight Shooter* received decidedly mixed reviews. Many felt that, although the album had been recorded only three months after the release of their debut album, the band had lost some of the magic. In spite of this, it was widely agreed that the band showed great promise and anticipation for their next release ran high.

The first of the standout singles from *Straight Shooter* was undoubtedly *Good Lovin' Gone Bad*, a track written by guitarist Mick Ralphs: **'If I remember correctly Mick had written it, I know he wrote it with Paul. I think it was about one of Paul's relationships with**





'It's hard to know exactly what's going to come out now, but the great thing is that there's an amazing amount of potential. We have a lot to draw from each other and a lot to learn from each other and that's bound to reflect in the songs.'
– Paul Rodgers on the Bad Company's formation

**him and a girl, "Good loving gone bad, bye bye, I'll see you later".'**

*Good Lovin' Gone Bad*, reached No. 36 in the US, but its success was eclipsed by the popularity of the album's final single *Feel Like Makin' Love* which shot to No. 10 in August 1975. The unusual combination of genres on *Feel Like Makin' Love* made it an instant hit, particularly in the US. The combination of country ballad and storming rock anthem was unique and the transition between the two genres seamless. The track really showed what Bad Company were capable of and has long been one of the band's staples: **'There was a marriage of two songs, there was a little country song that Paul had, and then Mick had this [sings the riff]. They just combined the two and it kind of worked. Heavy metal meets country, it worked big time – it's another classic song.'**

Bad Company barely even stopped to take a breather as they reentered the studio just one month after the release of *Feel Like Makin' Love*. Work began on their third album in France with the use of the famous Rolling Stones' Mobile Truck. The truck had been key in creating many iconic albums during the early seventies, and even provided the inspiration for the Deep Purple classic *Smoke on the Water* when it nearly caught fire in Switzerland.

The truck certainly did the trick for Bad Company and the new album *Run with the Pack* shot to No. 4 in the UK and No. 5 in the US when it was released in February 1975. The album was critically acclaimed and included some classic numbers such as the fan-favourite *Silver, Blue & Gold*, which disappointingly was never released as a single despite its enduring popularity. The singles from the album charted well but didn't achieve the success of previous singles. Bad Company's cover of the Coasters' *Young Blood* reached No. 20, but *Honey Child* only climbed to No. 59 despite the fact that it is one of the rare Bad Company numbers to be written by the entire band.

Bad Company planned to support the release of *Run with the Pack* with a tour of the UK. It was decided that they would rejoin with their ex-Free band mate Paul Kossoff to share a line-up with his current outfit Back Street Crawler. Unfortunately tragedy struck one month before the tour was due to begin when Paul Kossoff died onboard a domestic flight in the US. Paul had always been a shockingly hard living individual, however it seemed that at this point the rock and roll lifestyle was taking its toll all around.

**'Rock and roll and drugs always go hand in hand, they always will but in the seventies it was really nutty. Coke was the worst thing; we all did it. Paul stopped doing it in about 1976, but the three of us – we all did it. It made us drink too much and take downers and it kind screwed up a lot of bands. If we'd just stuck with drinking pints or vodka, or the odd glass of wine then we'd probably still be together now.'**

Bad Company ploughed on nonetheless and were back in the studio in July–August of the same year. They again recorded in France, but chose to delay the release of their new album *Burnin' Sky* so as not to compete with *Run with the Pack*, which was still in the charts at the time. This decision didn't seem to work well for the group as upon its release in March 1977, *Burnin' Sky* performed the worst of any Bad Company album thus far. The release peaked at No. 15 in the US, and No. 17 in the UK and garnered a critical reception that was lukewarm at best. It was clear that things were starting to go awry within the band, and 1978 marked the first year without the release of a studio album since Bad Company formed: **'Bad Company had all the plaques on the wall and all the awards, but I think we kind of lost our**

Bad Company in 1975. From left to right: Mick Ralphs, Paul Rodgers (standing), Simon Kirke and Boz Burrell.

**way after the fourth album. We had a huge following and we sort of rode it gently downhill.'**

The final release from this period was 1979's *Desolation Angels*, which marked a short upturn in Bad Company's fortunes. It was released in March and shot to No. 3 in the US and No. 10 in the UK. The album is distinctive as it is the first time we hear synthesisers being used on Bad Company material – a sound that captured the zeitgeist of the time. The standout single from *Desolation Angels* is undoubtedly *Rock 'n' Roll Fantasy*, penned by Paul Rodgers. The single peaked at No. 13 in the US but was a perennial hit, instantly recognisable by its trademark synthesizer riff: **'Paul had been given this octave divider by Leslie West from Mountain. It literally drops all the strings an octave on the guitar and I heard him playing with it in the studio and it was like "Wow!" It was a great beat to play along to.'**

*Desolation Angels* has since become a firm favourite with the listening public and has been certified double platinum since 1979. Unfortunately soon after the album's release tragedy once again struck when Led Zeppelin drummer John Bonham died suddenly in a plane crash on 25 September 1980. This news devastated Bad Company's longtime manager Peter Grant, who also the manager and a close friend of Led Zeppelin.

Grant struggled terribly with the news and progressively lost his zeal and passion for music management. He had been a key part of Bad Company's operation and the band found themselves lost without him. With Bad Company seemingly in limbo between management and projects, Paul Rodgers became disillusioned and decided to leave the group in 1982.

**'It was a shame when Paul decided to leave, Peter Grant went in to seclusion and so our management folded and we were drifting around – it was a terrible year. Paul was unhappy and he said, 'Look, I'm off.' Me, Mick and Boz after a year decided to carry on with someone else and that became a bit of a nightmare, so that was the one episode in Bad Company's thirty years that I really regret.'**

Despite the band's decision to carry on without Paul, his departure marked the end of an era for Bad Company, and it was a creative loss that they never truly recovered from. Paul has rejoined the band for select dates in recent years, and even teased of his first appearance on new material since 1982 earlier this year. Sadly guitarist Mick Ralphs has recently suffered severe health problems and so will be unable to join the band in any future reunions, which means the chance to see the classic line-up in action again has unfortunately passed.

Nonetheless, Bad Company remain an iconic rock group, one that exuded fun and epitomised the rock and roll lifestyle they sang of. With their outstanding talent and charm on and off stage we'd be forced to say that Bad Company are in fact pretty great company after all.

**'There are two chapters of Bad Company, up till when Paul left in 1982, and then the two bands that came after that that went under the name of Bad Company. To all intents and purposes the original Bad Company was the best; for those six or seven years we just had a ball.'**

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# ELTON JOHN

## BECOMING ROCKET MAN

With a career spanning over fifty years, more than fifty Top 40 hits and over 300 million records sold, Elton John is one of the most successful solo artists of all time. His powerful stage presence and distinctive vocal style make him one of the most unique artists in the history of popular music. Here Stuart Epps recalls his time spent with Elton John during 1967–1976.

### IN THE BEGINNING

**I first met Elton in 1967 when I went to work at Dick James Music as the office boy.**

One of the musicians who was signed to Dick James as a songwriter was Reg Dwight. Reg was playing keyboards in Long John Baldry's band, and his new name came from Elton Dean the sax player and John Baldry himself. Baldry was a pretty outrageous guy, very flamboyant. It is amazing to think now that Elton was in his band. They did a lot of gigs together many at the famous Marquee Club in Wardour Street.

It was also at this time that Elton met the great guitarist Caleb Quaye. I recently heard that when Eric Clapton was on a chat show in the States, he said that Caleb was his favourite guitarist. Caleb was the engineer at Dick James and saw the talent in Elton. They started working together, with Caleb playing and producing, putting together an album that has never been released.

A lot of the tracks on the album that Elton was making with Caleb saw Elton writing the lyrics, and they weren't that great: *The Year of the Teddy Bear*, *Tartan Coloured Lady*, *The Tide Will Turn for Rebecca*. Caleb's first single on his own was called *Baby Your Phrasing Is Bad* backed with *Witch with Half-Strength Powers*.

It wasn't surprising that when a young country boy called Bernie Taupin answered an ad for a lyricist that Elton's manager had put in *Melody Maker*, everyone, including Elton, was very pleased. As the story goes, it was Bernie's mother who saw the ad and persuaded Bernie to reply. Bernie was very shy and didn't say a lot, but when it came to putting words on paper he was, and still is, a brilliant poet.

Elton and Bernie made a strange writing duo, but at this time there were several others in the team putting down ideas in the studio. Elton was far from shy and would always be wearing something pretty strange, even in those days. In particular, I remember a Noddy shirt of his that looked very odd. I had never really met anyone quite like him and took to his brilliant humour and outgoing personality immediately.

### STEVE BROWN – 1969

**At this time, Dick James Music was one of the biggest music publishers. Dick's publishing catalogue was huge: Gerry and the Pacemakers, the Hollies, even the Coronation Street theme.**

Dick was a very shrewd businessman and quite a character too. In retrospect, it was all a bit disorganised in the studio, with the writers all doing bits and pieces. Elton was writing what he thought was commercial material, but his first single, *I've Been Loving You*, wasn't very good.

One afternoon in my copying room, Elton and Bernie brought in a guy called Steve Brown from EMI, who was being employed as a plugger and general A&R man. He looked like a real hippy, with long hair and beard, and seemed like a nice chap.

We played Steve the new Elton album that Caleb had produced, which we all thought was better than *Sgt. Pepper*. He was pretty quiet after the playback. I was later horrified to learn that he didn't think much of the album. Still, Elton and Bernie liked him and Steve suggested to them that maybe their material was too commercial and that they should write more from the heart.

Although he had never produced a record before, Steve recorded a song with Elton called *Lady Samantha*. It was simple but great. It got great reviews and a lot of radio play – but not many sales. However, Steve had good friends at the BBC, notably John Peel, who liked the record and played it a lot. After this great recording, all opinions of Steve changed, not only was Steve now Elton's producer, but he also became his friend and mentor.

In June 1969, Steve produced what became Elton's debut album. *Empty Sky* was recorded on four-track at DJM. I was at most of the sessions with Jeff, and we're credited on the sleeve with guarding the studio! This was a really great album, with superb playing by Caleb and Roger Pope on drums. It contained the brilliant ballad *Skyline Pigeon*. Here Steve wanted to go for a bit of weird reverb on Elton's voice, so it was recorded up the fire escape leading to the roof, which had a metallic echo sound.

These were very happy times at Dick's, and it was so exciting that we were the first to hear this great music. However, even in these early days, Elton did show signs of his sometimes-unpredictable temperament.

## DJM LAUNCHED – 16 MAY 1969

**With Steve Brown taking over the running of Elton's career as manager, producer and good friend that Elton could trust, things were now happening at an amazing rate. Dick James' son Stephen was the second in command running the publishing, but he didn't have Steve's talent for running the record company. Up until this point, Elton's two singles had been released on the Phillips label. There was no control over promotion and nothing was really happening with the releases on a grand scale.**

Then someone, probably Stephen, had the idea to launch DJM records. Steve Brown was going to run it and Elton was to be one of the first releases.

Elton's second single, *It's Me That You Need*, was released on the DJM label on 16 May 1969. It was again produced by Steve, and was the beginning of Elton's career proper. The first album *Empty Sky* was released on 3 June. Time was spent on the sleeve, and there were sleeve notes by Elton and comments from DJs, including John Peel. This was clever of Steve as it meant that the DJs were part of Elton's career, and more incentivised to play the tracks on the radio. Steve also got Elton playing many live broadcasts using most of the members of Hookfoot. When playing live with Hookfoot, or sometimes just alone on the piano, Elton was quite reserved, even shy. Even though Hookfoot were great musicians, they were a musician's band and audiences weren't exactly ecstatic. They put on no real show at this time, simply reproducing what was on the record as well as possible. This was about to change.

## ENTER GUS DUDGEON

**Elton was writing continuously, and sessions were booked at Olympic to record some of this new material. The usual band was booked, and what was recorded was a step on from *Empty Sky*, but still quite similar. Recording was good fun for us and I thought Steve was pleased with the result. He wasn't. Steve decided he wanted someone else to produce the album. He always wanted everything to be the best for Elton, even if it meant letting someone else taking over. He approached a lot of famous producers, including Denny Cordell of Leon Russell fame, who turned it down. Then, Steve had a meeting with a very eccentric, handsome and charismatic arranger called Paul Buckmaster.**

Elton John with lyricist Bernie Taupin shortly after they signed contracts with Dick James Music in 1968.

Paul and Steve got on well, and when Steve mentioned that he was looking for a producer, Paul suggested the producer of [David Bowie's] *Space Oddity*, Angus Boyd Dudgeon. A meeting was then set up for Gus to meet Elton and Bernie. By this time Elton had piano and vocal demos of some of the songs that were to be recorded for the next album. Recorded by Clive, the new songs were almost classical, and very different from anything on *Empty Sky*. Gus was well up to the job. He saw all the potential in the songs and loved the demos. This proved to be the beginning of another amazing partnership.

## THE ELTON JOHN ALBUM

**What took place next was unusual by any standards of album production, particularly a rock album. Instead of the usual two months of recording time, the pre-production was all-important. The songs had already been demoed by Elton, and many meetings took place between Gus, Elton, Paul, Steve and Bernie, going through every song in detail, deciding on instrumentation, musicians and arrangement.**

It was decided that Paul would not only write arrangements for the strings, but also for the rhythm section. This was an important step as it meant that the drums, bass and guitar would have to be played by session musicians that could read music, which ruled out Hookfoot, who had played on *Empty Sky*.

Of course, as soon as planning for the album began it was obvious that it wasn't going to be cheap to make. The studio that Gus had chosen was top-of-the-range Trident in Soho. Steve had a meeting with Dick about the cost of the recording, and I would love to have been there when he told him he needed £5000. I bet he nearly swallowed his cigar! This was a huge, unheard of amount to spend on an album. Thankfully, good old Dick wasn't a penny pincher, and as an ex-professional singer he knew that to make a great album you needed the best. The best is what he got.

The sessions took place in January 1970 and when Gus played back the album it was clear he had turned the songs into something extraordinary.

*Border Song* was released as the first single prior to the album's release on 20 March 1970. Looking back, it's amazing to think that *Your Song*, the all-time classic, wasn't chosen for the first single. However, at the time we thought *Border Song* had strong commercial qualities, and we all liked its soulful content.

So, Elton was about to release one of the best albums ever made, in our humble opinion, and we felt that it was obviously going to sell like hot cakes, and at least make the Top 10. Then an offer came through that we had all dreamt about: Elton was invited to perform on *Top of the Pops*.

We were all over the moon. The sales of *Border Song* hadn't been great up until this point, and this would surely send sales soaring. The sad fact is that there was little or no change in the sales figures following the show. It was all very disappointing. However, upon its release the album received rave reviews and we all knew we were on to something big.

## THE ELTON JOHN BAND

**Many artists faced with all this disappointment might have descended into the depths of despair, become drug addicts, alcoholics or joined the foreign legion. Instead, Elton decided that the best course of action was to form a shit-hot band and go on the road. Although Elton could get very depressed when things went wrong, he used his anger to spur him on to find a better way to make things happen. In fact, he is probably the most determined person I have ever met. His energy to succeed in whatever he attempts to do is quite amazing – and sometimes frightening. You could see and feel this energy when he was onstage in front of a difficult audience.**

The formation of Elton's very unique-sounding band took Elton from an average performing artist to one of the most amazing and successful rock performers of all time. Dee Murray, bass player with The Mirage, was playing amazing bass, some of the time playing chords. I had never heard this on a bass before and he had a huge sound. Nigel Olsson, who had been playing in the pop band Plastic Penny, had a massive kit (soon to become more massive) and was playing brilliant, solid rock rhythms, as he still does today. Elton is without doubt the best and most distinctive pianist I have ever seen. At the time it wasn't easy to amplify a grand piano or make sure a good one was available at the gig. However, his style and technique made the piano sound amazing with this new line-up without guitar, with plenty of space to shine through. It was great to hear the orchestral tracks from the album turned into these huge rock tracks.

## ELTON IN THE UNITED STATES

**Even before the *Elton John* album was released, Elton and Hookfoot were in Trident studios recording the next album, *Tumbleweed Connection*. This saw a bit of a return to the sound of the *Empty Sky* album – more band-orientated, much less orchestral.**

Elton and the band continued to do gigs at the Roundhouse, the Marquee, the Speakeasy and the Lyceum, and kept up the flow of live sessions for radio. Promotion wise it was all really getting into gear, and even if the sales figures weren't great, the name Elton John was certainly starting to get known. It seems amazing now, but only two months after Elton was on *Top of the Pops* performing *Border Song*, another single was released: *Rock and Roll Madonna*.

The record didn't do very well commercially, but it did show yet another side to Elton's versatile writing. It also showed Gus having a bit of fun in the studio. The track was made to sound like it was recorded live, with the sound of an audience added to it, which was actually taken from Jimi Hendrix live at the Albert Hall. The sound of the audience on the record also reflected that Elton was becoming a true live performer now, which saw him really take off in the States.

The *Elton John* album was released in the States on 22 July 1970, and on 26 August, Elton and the band played the first of a week of concerts at the now legendary Troubadour club in West Hollywood. Prior to this, an amazing character called Norman Winter was

Elton John in 1970.

'If you write great songs with meaning and emotion, they will last for ever because songs are the key to everything. Songs will outlast the artist and they will go on for ever if they are good.'
– Elton John

employed to handle the press for Uni Records. He wore a ten-gallon hat and was into any sort of publicity that he thought would get Elton noticed. Steve, Elton, and the band and crew were met at the airport by a red double-decker London bus, which didn't go down well. Too much hype. What the US promotion did do well, however, was to get some very big names and the press to the gig. Within only a couple of months from its release, the album had got around to much of the Hollywood music business. They obviously loved it and were looking forward to seeing Elton live.

What took place at this opening gig was the perfect way to introduce Elton to the States. The audience were expecting a rather sedate English folk singer, but what they got was quite different. Elton performed all the songs that they had heard and loved, but he gave them all this extra power, with Nigel's huge drums and Dee's brilliant playing. Without guitar there was plenty of room in the mix to have Elton's piano good and loud, and his playing was amazing.

Once they were back in England, Elton and the band played at the Royal Albert Hall. Then, in October of that year Elton was in the studio again, recording a soundtrack for a film called *Friends*. Although it wasn't a great film, some great tracks were recorded.

Following his success, Elton was then back in the States at the end of October, which included two nights at the legendary Fillmore West in San Francisco, with the Kinks. He then took part in a live broadcast in New York, which became his first live album, entitled *17/11/70*.

## FROM THE MARQUEE TO THE ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL

**Although 1970 was an amazing year, 1971 was no different. Between January and March, Elton worked really hard as he always does, doing everything at once: gigging, recording in the studio, radio broadcasts in London and Paris, interviews and producing an album with his long-time friend Long John Baldry. The records were showing healthy sales now and *Your Song* reached No. 7 in the UK charts. More significantly, the *Elton John* album received a gold disc for one million sales in the US, the *Friends* soundtrack album was also going up the US charts.**

## TOURING THE UNITED STATES WITH ELTON IN 1971

**Touring in the States was always better than in the UK. The audiences were so much more receptive. They were really out for a good time and Elton would give them just that. The audiences loved Elton and the band and he went down a storm every night, with the band getting tighter and tighter, and the sound getting better and better. We all loved the States, Elton more than anyone. He was appreciated, they were buying the albums, really getting into the lyrics and becoming real fans that would stay with him for years.**

Elton truly embraced America. This was the place where his favourite music came from and we were playing in the same venues as some of his favourite artists that he'd grown up listening to. To break America you really need to spend a lot of time there, and that means you have to love the country and the people. It's no good playing a few major cities and thinking that's going to do it. Elton's tours were at least three months long, and he would also do all the required promotion.

Of course, the fact that the Americans loved his music obviously helped. Elton sang in an American accent and they loved his quirkiness and showmanship, which harked back to the rock 'n' roll artists of the 1950s.

These early tours in the States gave Elton confidence and established him as a rock performer to equal any of the greats. He worked hard in those days and wouldn't come off stage until he had everyone on their feet. Nigel would come off stage soaked in sweat. On this 1971 tour, Elton played a warehouse gig in New Orleans, which I remember as the hottest gig ever. There was no air

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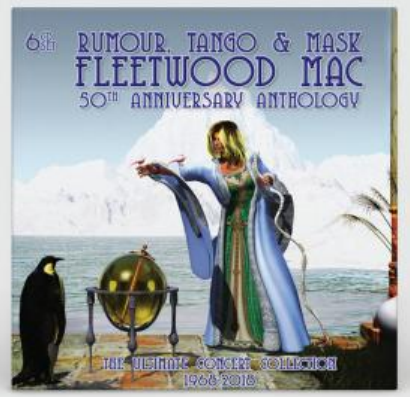


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Elton John onstage at the Hammersmith Odeon, London on 24 December 1974.
'For me, music is so passionate, I have to give it my all every time I go onstage. Onstage, it was always comfortable for me, because that's where I felt at home.' – Elton John

conditioning, and the warehouse was packed to the rafters. It was so hot that Nigel's sticks flew out of his hands every few minutes. The promoter had to go around rubbing ice over everyone.

Back in England, Elton played a great gig at Crystal Palace on 21 June. Hookfoot, Yes, Rory Gallagher and Fairport Convention were all on the same bill. What a great show! Dave Mattacks, the drummer with Fairport, would go on to become one of the most famous session drummers and a great friend, playing on Elton's *Ice on Fire* album. It was at this gig that Elton played the whole of his forthcoming album *Madman Across the Water*. It was incredible to play an album that no one had yet heard, but Elton always did what he wanted when it came to the shows – and still does.

## BACK IN THE STUDIO

**The *Madman* sessions commenced at Trident on 7 August 1971. Such a great album: amazing playing and a superb sound. This album had everyone on it: Hookfoot and Nigel and Dee. There are so many great songs on the album, with amazing arrangements by Paul Buckmaster. It also had the beautiful *Tiny Dancer*.**

Davey Johnsone was a good friend of Gus', having played in a folk band called Magna Carter that Gus had produced. Davey played brilliant acoustic guitar on *Madman Across the Water* that Gus put backwards echo on, and played mandolin and sitar on *Holiday Inn*. Everyone took to Davey immediately, such a great musician and a lovely guy. I don't suppose anyone, especially him, could have ever imagined that he would still be playing with Elton four decades later.

I remember that we were at Dave Larkham's house in LA when he was working on the sleeve. His wife had embroidered the title for the front cover. Steve suddenly had an idea to do the same for the back cover to include the titles. Amazingly, *Madman* only reached No. 40 in the UK charts.

The end of 1971 saw Elton touring the UK once again, with Marc Bolan from T. Rex making an appearance on stage with him at the Fairfield Hall, Croydon.

## GOODBYE REGINALD DWIGHT

**On 7 January 1972, Elton John was finally, officially, born. Reg changed his name by deed poll to Elton Hercules John. He had always felt a bit weird having two names. When people first met Elton they would of course call him Elton, and then suddenly when they thought he was a friend they'd call him Reg. The deed poll name change finally ensured he was no longer called Reg. Even his mum had to call him Elton.**

## RECORDING IN FRANCE AT THE CHÂTEAU

**Whether everyone was getting tired of recording at Trident or if it was for tax reasons I don't know, but I was asked to find out about recording in France. The Stones had moved there and they used to hire a mansion and set it up as a studio using a truck with all the recording gear in it. I contacted their roadie, Ian Stuart, to ask him if we could hire the gear and do the same, and looked into various mansions to rent.**

Gus went over to France to have a look, and it must have been at this time that he saw Strawberry Studio at the Château de Herouville, about an hour from Paris. He was very impressed, especially with the MCI desk, which he'd never seen or heard before. It was a beautiful place with bedrooms, games rooms, a swimming pool – everything. I booked the studio for the next album. We had very exiting and fun times at the Château, everyone living together while recording. There was a long table in the dining room where everyone would eat together, and a table tennis table, which saw some great battles.

## ROCKET RECORDS

**In May 1972 *Honky Château* was released. It contained lots of up-tempo tracks and another Elton classic in *Rocket Man*. This was then followed by *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road* at the beginning of October 1973 – two classic albums in two years.**

*Goodbye Yellow Brick Road* was again recorded at the Château, and Elton wrote most of the songs while we were

there. This was and most definitely still is an amazing album, containing *Daniel*, *Bennie and the Jets* and *Candle in the Wind*. *Candle in the Wind* became the biggest-selling single of all time when it was re-released with new words to commemorate the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. The album also contained *Funeral for a Friend (Love Lies Bleeding)*, that would become the opening song of Elton's live show for many gigs in the future.

Elton's career was absolutely roaring. Elton, the band and Gus had started recording at a new studio owned by American producer, musician and songwriter Jim Guercio, the Caribou Ranch in Colorado, from which Elton's next album, *Caribou*, took its name. It was another great album with two stand-out tracks: *Don't Let the Sun Go Down On Me* and *The Bitch is Back*. These songs must be favourites of Elton's too as he still plays them live.

In July Elton was back at Caribou recording *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds*, with John Lennon on guitar. This was such a thrill for everyone, especially Gus, who loved Lennon's music. This was to be the start of a great friendship and musical partnership between John and Elton. *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds*, reached No. 1 in October and Elton later sung on John's *Whatever Gets You Thru the Night*.

**Elton John in the Netherlands in 1975 during the tour to promote his ninth studio album** *Captain Fantastic and the Brown Dirt Cowboy.*

## THE 1974 TOUR WITH KIKI DEE FEATURING JOHN LENNON

**In September 1974, Elton started a tour of the States, with the Kiki Dee Band in support.**

We had our own plane, 'The Starship'. There was no more messing about at airports – we were better than first class all the way. Limousines with police escorts to the airport, and then your own plane painted with the tour dates. On the plane was a bar with an organ at one end, lounge chairs, and even a bedroom with a fireplace. There was even room for the Mussel Shoals Horns, who were playing with Elton. What an amazing tour it was.

28 November 1974 was the most amazing gig I have ever witnessed. The gig started with Kiki as usual, and then Elton came on. He was going down better than ever. The audience were going berserk and you couldn't imagine the performance being better or the audience being louder. I was standing at the stairs with John Lennon and some others, as he was about to go on. Surprisingly, he was petrified, really very nervous. We couldn't really understand why, as this was the guy who had played Shea Stadium in the biggest band in the world. How could he be nervous? However, it was some time since he'd been onstage, and he really didn't know how the audience would receive him.

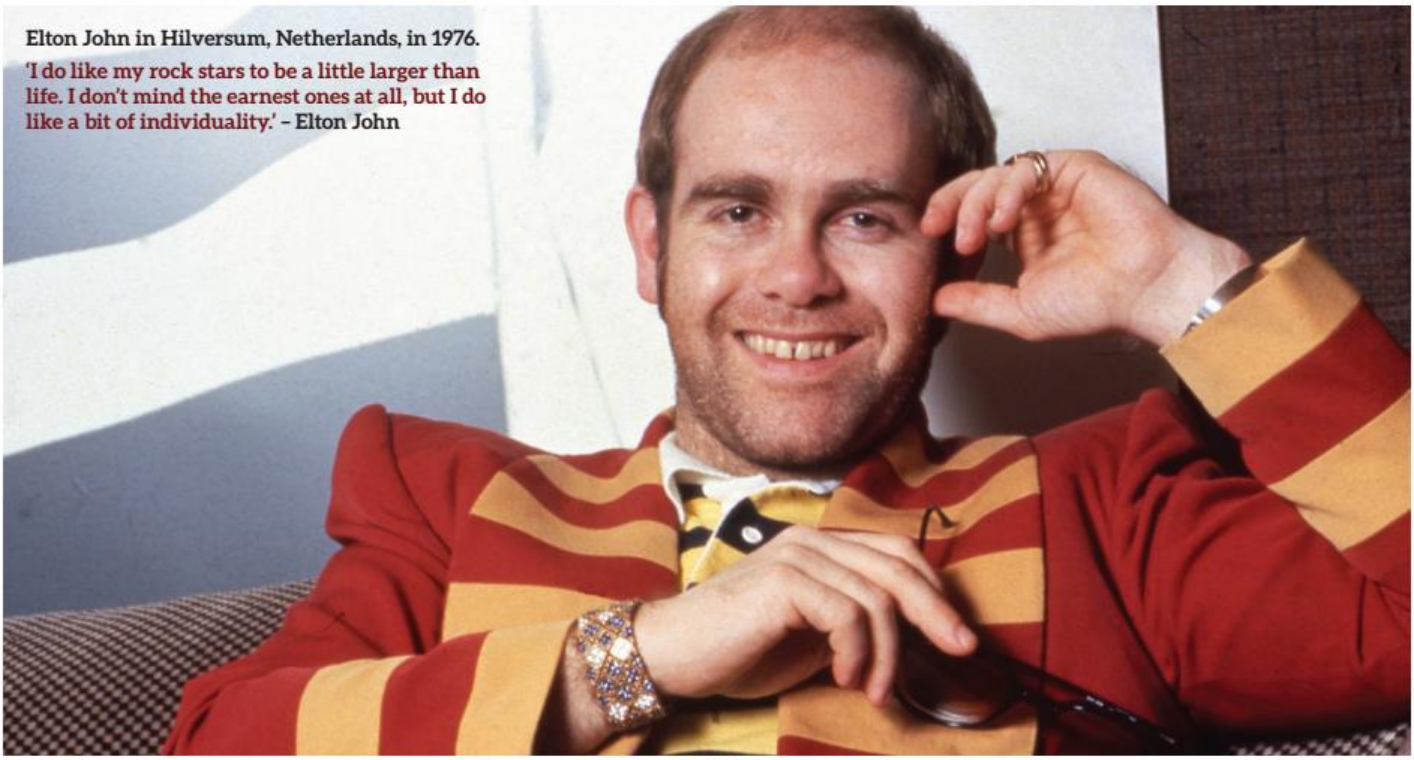
Of course, we all rushed to the front to see him come on. In a millisecond the audience were on their feet screaming. The sound was like nothing I had ever heard at a gig. It was like pure white noise and stayed at that pitch for what seemed like half an hour. I felt like it was never going to stop. They did *Lucy in the Sky*, *Whatever Gets You Thru the Night*, and as a big surprise, *I Saw Her Standing There*.

It has been hailed since as one of the most remarkable gigs ever. And, as it sadly turned out, it was John's last ever concert.

On returning to England, Elton had some very bad news for Dee and Nigel. He had decided to change the format of the band, and in the middle of April told them that it was over. Elton liked to change things now and again, and at this point he wanted a band that 'chugged'. I think what he meant was that he wanted a bit more musicianship. He wanted something more complex, to get away from the straight-sounding band with Dee and Nigel. Although I was sad for Dee and Nigel I was pleased for Popey, who was asked to join the new band with Caleb.

## THE MILL RECORDING STUDIOS IN COOKHAM, BERKSHIRE

**I went to see Gus at Rockfield Studios in Wales, where he was working with the Dutch band Solution. He had mentioned before that he was thinking of building a recording studio, but now he said he had actually found and bought a property and was in the planning stages.**



Elton John in Hilversum, Netherlands, in 1976.
'I do like my rock stars to be a little larger than life. I don't mind the earnest ones at all, but I do like a bit of individuality.' – Elton John

Gus had used many different studios over the years and there was always something wrong with all of them. He wanted to use his vast experience to build a studio that had everything right.

I wanted to work there, no doubt about it. I'd been booking studios for Elton for over ten years, so I knew a bit about what was needed. I think I must have called Gus as soon as I got home.

Anyway, as this is a story about Elton I will miss out the next two years or so and the amazing time I had while the studio was being built. I will also miss out two Elton albums, *Captain Fantastic* and *Rock of the Westies*. I want to go straight to what is an amazing standout album, *Blue Moves*. These are a few words from Gus on the album: 'It's done with the new band. And there's no comparison I can make about working with these people and the old group. It's really like working with a whole new artist. There's a lot more instrumental space all the way around. Loads of long passages of just music. But they are arranged passages. None of that six-minute bullshit where somebody plays a self-indulgent guitar solo. And I'm talking about proper sections, which have been entirely worked out. Much like what we did with the first album. Only much more open, and diversified than we did back then. I suppose that you could say we flower here, fulfilling the promise of better things to come that one got from *The Rock of the Westies*. I really think it comes true on this LP.'

I was now working for Gus full time at the Mill. Gus was roaring in his career, and it had never been a better time for him. All of Elton's albums were going to No. 1 and selling millions. He had a huge hit with Elton and Kiki's duet *Don't Go Breaking My Heart* and he was busy building the best studio in the world. The studio was being built to deal with quadraphonic, surround sound, and the idea was to re-mix all Elton's albums in quad.

Then, in 1976 Elton booked studio time at the Mill, this time with Clive producing. It was also great to be working with Elton again. He was in good form, although seeing as he wasn't working with Bernie the lyrics were becoming a bit strange again, with one of the songs called *Hello Campers*. Luckily it didn't make it on the album. Elton and Clive asked Paul Buckmaster to write the string arrangements. Clive had a meeting with him weeks before recording was due to start to give him plenty of time to write the scores. Just before the string sessions, Paul told Clive that his cat had tipped ink all over the scores and they were ruined. We think that this was a story he made up, but either way, Paul and Clive were up all night before the sessions sorting out the string parts.

The album included a track that became a classic for Elton. Elton had apparently written the song the same day the office boy at Rocket Records had been killed on his motorbike. He was only seventeen and his name was Guy. *Song for Guy* became a big hit and is still played on the radio decades later.

**We all know the rest of this story, as Elton John went on to become one of the biggest selling stars of all time. His flair and talent have been admired around the world, and he shows no sign of slowing down, with sellout tours and the recent release of his *Rocketman* biopic. Elton's distinctive style and instantly recognisable voice make him true superstar in every sense of the word, and we look forward to many more years with the Rocketman himself.**

These were extracts from *Elton John – In Performance* by Stuart Epps.

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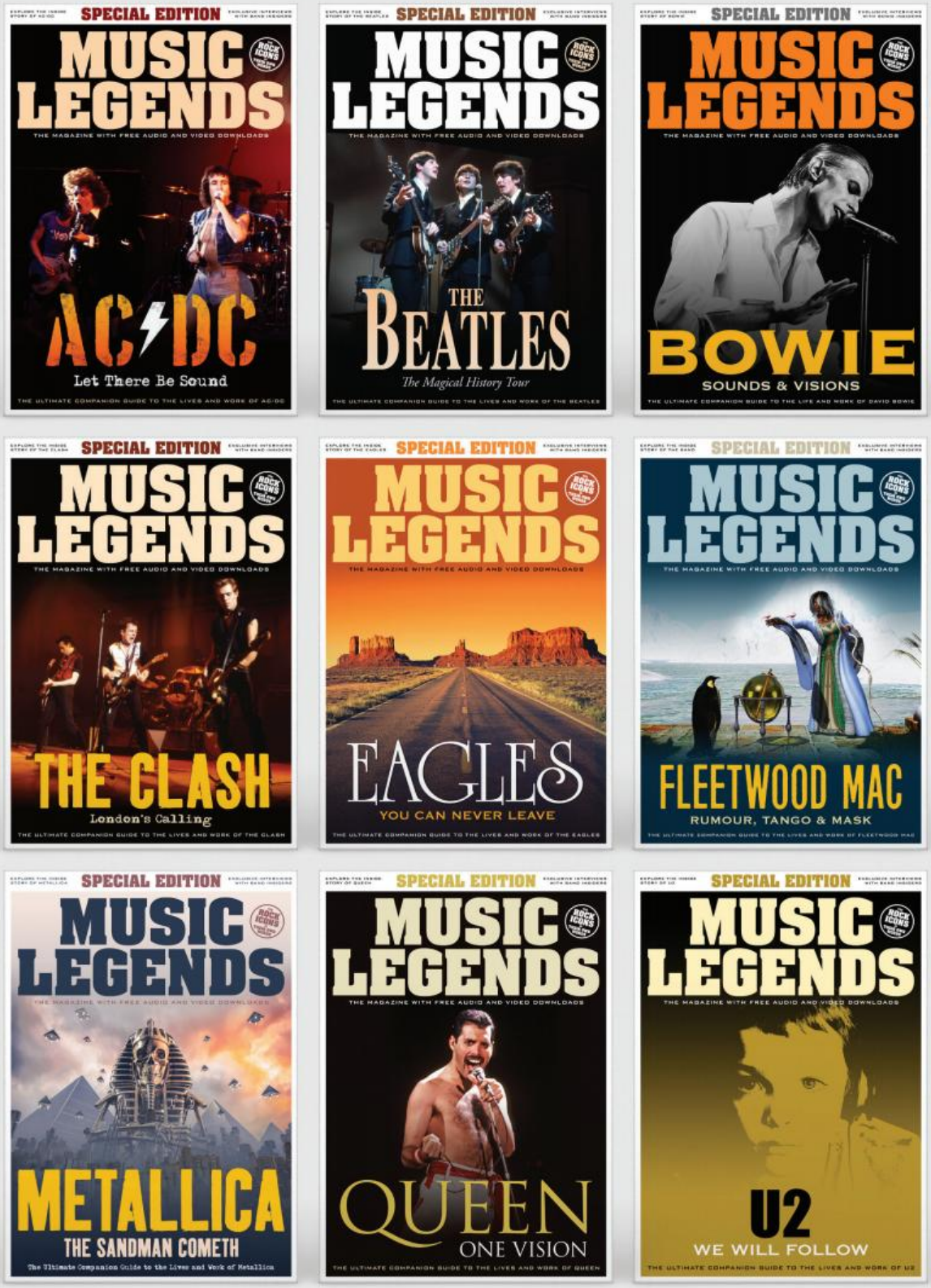


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